

September 11th Remembrance Ceremony (rev. 5-27-22)

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I. Overview

The United States of America suffered a severe blow when attacked on September 11th, 2001. Thousands of lives were lost, including many in public safety.

Whether individual fire, police or EMS organizations choose to have an annual remembrance is, of course, their decision. What we hope to do is to present a basic plan to do a simple remembrance ceremony each September 11th. It shows all the steps needed - before, during, and after.

We are not suggesting that the ceremony described here is the only one that is possible. Some organizations have remembrance ceremonies on a much larger scale. All we are trying to do is make it as easy for any organization, especially those who have stopped, or even never had a remembrance ceremony, to have one.

The planning calendar begins with June 11th (three months before September 11th) up to the day of the ceremony, and the days after. We provide information for contingencies (unable to find someone to play Taps, find a bell to toll the four-fives, inclement weather), military protocol (flag raising, military commands), and background / historical information about the September 11th attacks.

As the years go by we might forget the supreme sacrifice made by many. Time, after all, does make us forget. **We know what happened that day, we can only try to remind others.**

(Note: this document was originally written for a Remembrance Ceremony in 2006. See section XI. "Thanks" for more information.)

II. Planning

June 11th - Three Months before September 11th Remembrance Ceremony

This is the most important date - the decision of whether, or not a September 11th Remembrance Ceremony will be held.

Some areas to be discussed:

- will it be a simple ceremony for department members only, a major ceremony with invited guests, full news coverage, or something in between?
- will other public safety organizations, military and military support organizations (VFW, American Legion, etc.) be invited to be part of the ceremony?
- will relatives and friends of public safety and military members killed in the attacks be invited to speak, if that is their desire?
- will other fire departments be involved? Having a **regional ceremony** may be best. More personnel to do the various tasks, and a higher probability of attendance by the media and desired speakers. The ceremony begins at 9:45am – one person can only be at one place at one time.
- if a regional ceremony, consider the Color Guard be comprised of one member from each participating department.
- who will be invited? The public? The press? Community cable TV?
- consider having the ceremony at a large outdoor venue, possibly a school sports stadium.
- what are the logistical concerns - place for ceremony, available parking, collation, etc.

TASK ASSIGNMENTS:

- coordinator / facilitator
- Taps player(s)
- bell ringer
- flag raiser / lowerer
- officer to give commands
- clergy / prayer reader(s)
- photographer
- publicity (public information officer)
- collation supervisor
- scribe – there's a lot going on – document.

Keep an accurate log throughout the process of who you spoke to regarding permissions and participation in the program. Include contact information so you can confirm participation, etc. later. Also, this log can be a helpful starting point in the planning process for future years.

Of all tasks listed above, perhaps the most important is the first listed - coordinator / facilitator. It is suggested that two people be assigned this task. Each year one is replaced so there is an overlap of experience, plus redundancy if one person is not available at a given time (based on the nature of the fire service). This position keeps track of assignments, re-allocates resources, and basically keeps the projects(s) on track. The meetings leading up to the actual September 11th Remembrance Ceremony become progress reports. At this first meeting the scope of the ceremony, and what it will take to have that ceremony is determined.

- are permissions needed for use of the ceremony area, parking, raising / lowering the flag, etc.
- how will the ceremony be publicized? For a list of potential methods see "Getting the Message Out", below.
- will a program be given out at the ceremony? What will it say? Who will produce the program?

Based on all of the above a schedule must be developed listing each action, the time it starts and who does it.

Contingencies and backups are suggested for a number of functions (Also see "September 11th Ceremony Contingencies", below)

- Taps - if a live person (or persons) is not available.
- bells - if a bell is not available consider the use of a church bell, or use the recorded version on YouTube ("The Four Fives")
- inclement weather – consider what to do if it rains. Covid issues might prevent using an indoor location.

This is also a good time to carefully look at the flag that will be used in the ceremony. Is it in good condition? If not, start the process to replace it. After it is replaced refer to disposal of American flags as stated in the US Flag Code, Title 4, Chapter 1, Section 8(k): "The flag, when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display, should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning"

Is there another flag available to use instead of the existing one that has added significance (possibly a flag that has flown in a war zone) (Also see "Flag Protocol", below)

Getting the Message Out

Listed below are some methods to announce the September 11th Remembrance ceremony.

- Community Cable TV
- Direct Mail
- Community meals (Ham & Beans supper, Meals on Wheels, etc.)
- Newspapers
- News Releases to town officials, veterans groups (VFW, etc.), fraternal organizations (Moose, etc.)
- Fire Department Open House
- Posters at strategic locations (super markets, department stores, library, post office, town offices, etc.)
- School Newsletter
- Town Meeting report
- Town activities (Old Home Day, Church Fair, etc.)
- Verbal - firefighter to other firefighters and to civilians
- Social media – Twitter, Facebook, etc.
- Fire Department Blog
- Fire Department Website
- Town Website
- Town Bulletin Board
- Email
- Senior Center Newsletter
- Electronic message board

July 11th - Two Months before September 11th Remembrance Ceremony

At this meeting the coordinator / facilitator provides a progress report. Adjustments are made, as necessary.

Detail planning takes place. For example, if Taps will be played by a local high school student (which is what we did), do we have to make a formal request to the school administration? Do we have to provide transportation, to and from the event for the student(s)?

Has permission been received for parking, collation area, etc.?

This is also a good time to discuss contingencies. The fire service is very resourceful at emergencies. We can try to anticipate possible problems, and plan alternatives.

Do all department members have a uniform for the ceremony? Do they fit? Are pieces missing (cap, dress shirt, etc.)

If the "Four Fives" are to be done via a fire truck bell, what if that truck is unavailable? One might be tapping out the four fives on a church bell. Another may use the recording of the four fives on YouTube ("The Four Fives").

The same is true of the playing of Taps. Some options are using a downloaded version of Taps, a Taps player (s) from a Veteran's group or from **Bugles Across America**. (See VIII. Ceremony Contingencies)

This is a good time to review the methods that have been chosen to get the message out. Is it clear who is going to be notified, when this is to happen, and who is to do the notifying?

Each step of the ceremony must be scrutinized so that there are no surprises!

August 11th - One Month before September 11th Remembrance Ceremony

The progress report from the coordinator / facilitator at this meeting (hopefully) is that all assignments have been made; permissions (if necessary) have been received; a bell has been secured; Taps player(s) have been secured (and transportation arrangements made for them if necessary); and all other details checked out.

Review the "getting the message out" section to see if all notifications have been made and determine who might be meeting with department representative (such as public information officer) after the ceremony to discuss the ceremony.

The fact sheet that the department representative (public information officer) will distribute after the ceremony is developed here.

This is a good time to do a desk top walk through of the entire ceremony. Does everyone know exactly what they do and when they do it? This is also a good time to review the section on military protocol regarding flag raising and commands. It is strongly suggested that a script be written which includes times, actions, and persons performing actions.

Next, go to the ceremony location and actually go through the entire ceremony (with simulation of raising the flag to half-staff). The ceremony should be rehearsed until everyone is comfortable. Adjustments, if necessary, can be made and a final script written.

Review the contingencies section (see below) as it discusses downloading Taps, the four fives and inclement weather.

This is also probably a good time to schedule the meeting after the ceremony. This meeting will critique the ceremony - what went good (hopefully everything), what didn't, feedback from the community, and the plan for the first meeting for the next year.

September 4th - One Week before September 11th Remembrance Ceremony

At this point all preparation has been done, and the purpose of this meeting is to make sure that everything and everyone is on track.

CHECKLIST:

- verify that everyone knows their task, and the time that their task begins.
- double check with external individuals and organizations to verify their actions / representation / presence.
- verify that all equipment works - P.A. system, downloaded Taps or the Four Fives, etc.
- If a program has been prepared, who will distribute it?

Based on the nature of our business, it might also be a good time to verify each assignment has a backup (wherever possible).

September 10th - One Day before September 11th Remembrance Ceremony

Last check for everything. Hope for no calls tonight so that everyone has a good night's sleep.

September 11th

CHECKLIST:

- Have all trucks been pulled onto apron, or other designated location?
- Does all equipment work (electrical, etc.)
- Will refreshments be ready after the ceremony at the collation?
- Is everyone present and do they know their times and assignments?
- Are Taps players at assigned locations?
- Have guest speakers (if any) been advised of their speaking order? **(Note: It is strongly suggested any proposed speaker be thoroughly vetted and verified to confirm that he/she was a member of the FDNY or any other organization – NYPD, military, etc. Sadly, there have been many imposters over the years. FDNY general information number is 718-999-2000)**
- Is the Public Information Officer (or alternate) ready to speak to the press at the conclusion of the ceremony?
- Does anyone (such as the Taps players) need a ride back home, or to school.

Good Luck!!

III. The Ceremony

9:45 A.M. (Eastern Time) - Apparatus roll out of bays to appropriate location

9:50 A.M. - Uniformed Fire, Police, EMS and Military personnel assemble at a point in front of station flag, assembled in one or more rows facing the flag, under the direction of the Commanding Officer

9:58 A.M. Commanding Officer: "the tolling of the bell 5 times, with 4 repetitions, represents how the New York City Fire Department, FDNY, announced the line of duty death of a firefighter"

9:59 A.M. - TIME OF SOUTH TOWER COLLAPSE

Bell tolled 5 – 5 – 5 – 5

Commanding Officer: "ATTEN HUT, HAND SALUTE"

Lower station flag to half-staff (if flag is already at half-staff it is lowered fully, then raised to half-staff) when "raising" a flag to half-staff is to "raise to full height briskly, then lower to half-staff ceremoniously

Flag tied off, operator salutes

Commanding Officer: "READY TWO", we will have 1 minute of silence

Taps played

Taps played at distant location (echo)

Commanding Officer: "AT EASE"

Clergy: Oh God, we remember before you this day our brothers and sisters lost on September 11, 2001. We thank you for their example of courage and sacrifice. In your boundless compassion, console their families, friends, co-workers and all who mourn their loss. Give us faith to see in death the gate of eternal life, so that in quiet confidence we may continue our journey and serve with honor, dignity and courage.

Refrain: AMEN.

Firefighter: When I am called to duty, wherever flames may rage, give me the strength to save a life, whatever be its age. Help me embrace a little child before it is too late, or save an older person from the horror of that fate. Enable me to be alert and hear the weakest shout, and quickly and efficiently to put the fire out. I want to fill my calling and to give the best in me, to guard my every neighbor and protect his property. And if according to God's will, I must answer death's call, bless with your protecting hand, my family, one and all.

Refrain: AMEN.

Bell tolled 5 – 5 – 5 – 5

Commanding Officer: "ATTEN HUT, HAND SALUTE"

Station flag raised (if it was at half-staff prior to ceremony it is raised fully, then lowered to half-staff).

Commanding Officer: "READY TWO"

Brief comments from fire department official

Brief comments from police department official

Brief comments from EMS official

Brief comments from military official

Brief comments from public official

Commanding Officer: "Thank you for attending our September 11th Remembrance Ceremony".

If applicable, commanding officer then invites all to attend the collation.

IV. After the Ceremony

It is anticipated that the media will ask questions after the ceremony. Avoid any political questions, and explain that today is about remembering those who died that day. The P.I.O., or other department representative, should have an information packet available for distribution. Some of the items that might be included are:

- the fact sheet that the department representative (public information officer) has developed
- information from September 11th Background / Historical Information (below)
- how FDNY adjusted to the loss of the 343 firefighters who died at the World Trade Center, the subsequent retirement of many members of the department, the emotional and physical toll the attacks took on FDNY survivors.
- the on-going death of FDNY members, the result of their involvement in the search for the remains in the months following the attack.
- how your local department honors the memory of those killed on 9/11 and the promise to "Never Forget"
- if someone in your local fire / EMS/ police was directly inspired to pursue this career because of Sept 11th would like to share their story?
- if anyone at the ceremony has a connection to the FDNY / NYPD / Port Authority / NYC, or who lost a family member on September 11th. If so, would they like to share their story?

V. The Follow-up Meeting

This meeting, held soon after the Remembrance Ceremony, serves a number of functions:

- thanking all who were involved in the Remembrance Ceremony. Perhaps a gift (department patch or tee shirt) or a certificate of appreciation to civilians who helped with the ceremony.
- a critique of the ceremony – what went right, what went wrong, what could have been done better?
- the beginning of the planning process for next year's ceremony.

VI. September 11th Background / Historical Information

The September 11 attacks were a series of four coordinated terrorist attacks upon the United States on September 11, 2001.

The attacks resulted in 2,977 fatalities, over 25,000 injuries, and substantial long-term health consequences, in addition to at least \$10 billion in infrastructure and property damage. It was the deadliest terrorist attack in human history and the single deadliest incident for firefighters and law enforcement officers in the history of the United States.

On that morning, 19 Islamist terrorists affiliated with al-Qaeda hijacked four commercial passenger jet airliners. The hijackers intentionally crashed two of the airliners into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, killing everyone on board and many others working in the buildings. Both buildings collapsed within two hours, destroying at least two nearby buildings and damaging others. The hijackers crashed a third airliner into the Pentagon. The fourth plane crashed into a field near Shanksville in rural Somerset County, Pennsylvania, after some of its passengers and flight crew attempted to retake control of the plane, which the hijackers had redirected toward Washington, D.C. There were no survivors from any of the flights.

The United States responded to the attacks by launching a "War on Terrorism", invading Afghanistan to depose the Taliban, who had harbored al-Qaeda terrorists, and enacting the USA PATRIOT Act. Many states also strengthened their anti-terrorism legislation and expanded law enforcement powers. Some American stock exchanges stayed closed for the rest of the week, and posted enormous losses upon reopening, especially in the airline and insurance industries. The destruction of billions of dollars' worth of office space caused the economy of Lower Manhattan to grind to a halt.

Cleanup of the World Trade Center site was completed in May 2002, and the Pentagon was repaired within a year. The construction of One World Trade Center began in November 2006, and the building opened in November 2014. Numerous memorials have been constructed, including the National September 11 Memorial & Museum in New York City, the Pentagon Memorial in Arlington County, Virginia, and the Flight 93 National Memorial at the Pennsylvania crash site. (Courtesy Wikipedia)

VII. The Striking of the "Four Fives"

Long before radios and voice alarm FDNY used the fire alarm telegraph system to announce the line of duty death of a firefighter. The signal 5-5-5-5 was transmitted over both primary and secondary circuits.

When fire trucks became equipped with radios, the telegraph signal would be followed up with a radio announcement: "It is with regret that announcement is made of the death of ..."

VIII. Ceremony Contingencies

Audio of the Four Fives - 5-5-5-5

If a bell is not available to ring at the ceremony consider a church bell. The effect would be wonderful! The major concern is co-ordination. It would require communication between the ceremony site, and the bell ringer. It would also require instruction as to what the bell ringer would do - cadence, spacing.

Another option is "The Four Fives" on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Egg4PhIZrAI>

Taps

If a bugler is not available consider using one of the renditions on YouTube. Local Veteran's organizations or **Bugles Across America** may be able to provide Taps players. To contact **Bugles Across America** go to their website: <https://www.buglesacrossamerica.org>

Inclement Weather

If necessary to move indoors most of the ceremony can be still be done.

The one exception is that part of the ceremony where the flag is lowered to half-staff.

The choices would be to salute an indoor flag, or use an outdoor flag (assuming that it is properly allowed to be displayed in inclement weather).

IX. Flag Protocol

Destroying Damaged American Flag:

According to the United States Code, Title 4 Chapter 1, Section 8, "The flag, when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display, should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning."

If you feel uncomfortable disposing of your flag in this manner, contacting a local veteran's group in your area is suggested. These groups hold ceremonies to dispose of flags, and the group's members are quite capable of disposing of the flag in a dignified, lawful manner.

Obtaining a New Flag:

New flags may be obtained from a member of Congress, possibly a flag that has flown in a war zone. Remember that the flag is the symbol of our nation, be sure it is an American-made flag.

American Flag Code: <https://www.ushistory.org/BETSY/flagcode.htm>

Displaying the Flag: <https://www.ushistory.org/betsy/flagetiq.html#display>

X. Links

The FDNY Fire Family Transport Foundation: assists the families of firefighters in their times of greatest need, in transporting firefighters, family members and department personnel to and from medical institutions both for care and family support. <http://www.firefamilytransport.org>

The FDNY Foundation: The official not-for-profit of the New York City Fire Department. The mission is to promote fire and life safety education and help the FDNY better protect New York. <https://www.fdnycfoundation.org>

The Tunnel to Towers Foundation: honors the sacrifice of firefighter Stephen Siller who laid down his life to save others on September 11, 2001. Also honors our military and first responders who continue to make the supreme sacrifice of life and limb for our country. <https://t2t.org>

The UFA Widow's and Children's Fund: Distributes funds directly to the families of Fallen Firefighters. <https://ufanyc.org/philanthropy/#donate>

XI. Thanks

Many people helped to develop this. I'd like to think of my role as that of a facilitator, the real work was done by the people below. **Thank you all.**

From FDNY: Honorary Chief of Department Jack Lerch, John Mulligan (FDNY Press Office).

From the Fire Bell Club of New York: Barry Gintel, Ed Kelly, Dennis Whittem, and Jim Griffiths.

Capt Dean Kochanowski (W. Boylston, MA FD), Chief Jack Chandler (W. Boylston, MA FD), Ric Plummer (Berlin, MA FD), Chief Jack Jansen (Columbia, SC FD), Lt. Fred Cummings (Berlin, MA FD)

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From Massachusetts: John Davis, Chief Russ Hall, Chief Joe Flanagan, Chief Sam Richesson and Chief Michael Winn.

For reading and editing this document (many times), my wife Bonnie. For technical assistance, my son Michael Hoffman.

I apologize if I left anyone out. Ira Hoffman, May, 2022 iraatfsp@gmail.com

Dedicated to the memory of Jack Duggan (1937-2013), FDNY Ladder 120