



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 7, 2016

CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS PRESS CONFERENCE ON CRANE SAFETY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Afternoon, everyone. We're here to update you on the follow up that this city's undertaking as a result of the very serious and tragic incident that occurred here on Friday. I want to thank all of the leaders who are with us today, all of the elected officials, you'll hear from them momentarily. I'd like to thank the members of my administration as well, our Buildings Commissioner Rick Chandler, our Emergency Management Commissioner Joe Esposito, Transportation Commissioner Polly Trottenberg, First Deputy Commissioner of FDNY Bob Turner, and Chief of Department Jim Leonard, Deputy Chief NYPD John Cassidy. Want to thank Bruce Ehrmann of Community Board 1, and the Chair of Community Board 1 Catherine McVay Hughes for being with us today and for their support as we go through this investigation and deal with the aftermath of this tragedy. There's a full investigation going on to review everything that happened on Friday, to determine exactly what caused this accident, and to determine changes that may be necessary in policies as a result of it. And we want to make sure every step of the way that we keep the public updated as more information becomes available.

The investigation is underway, it will take weeks for sure, some elements may take several months. We expect at least some preliminary information in the course of the month of February. But again, as we get definitive information, we will provide it. As you know, just before 8:30AM on Friday morning, a crane collapsed here along Worth Street between West Broadway and Church. Part of this tragedy – we lost an extraordinary man, 38-year-old David Wicks, a brilliant mathematician and a man who despite his brilliance, was known for his humility and his grace. Immigrated to our city from Prague to chase his dreams, and was lost tragically Friday morning. We offer to his family and friends our thoughts and our prayers in their time of grief. Three others were injured that morning, all of them, thank God, are now out of the hospital, and our thoughts and prayers are with them as well.

Now, given what happened here, it's extraordinary that there was not more damage. And it's extraordinary that we did not lose more people. And so something of a miracle occurred here. But despite that fact, there is much we need to know and much we need to learn from this incident. In the aftermath, we should recognize that the crew working on this crane was doing exactly what they were supposed to do at that time, which is as they saw the wind speeds increasing, they were moving to put the crane in to a secure position. And the crew was redirecting foot traffic and vehicle traffic away from the street, or obviously in the middle of rush hour, there would have been more people and more vehicles on the street. So thank God the crew did exactly what they were supposed to do.

As you heard on Friday, Department of Buildings personnel had visited this site at approximately 6:20AM the previous morning to approve additional measures. And at that time, everything was seen to be proper by the Department of Buildings. Again, the workers on Friday morning did not begin work on the site, but immediately seeing the winds, made the move to secure the crane, so their timing was appropriate. Upon arrival, they immediately determined the need to secure the crane.

Investigation's underway now, including by NYPD and the Department of Buildings, and there is a forensic investigation underway looking at the equipment itself. So again, I'm sure there'll be questions – questions about which theories we're working on – we don't do anything hypothetically when it comes to a matter this serious. We are looking at all elements: the way different personnel handled the situation, we're looking at the equipment itself. Everything is being investigated by Department of Buildings and by NYPD.

We're continuing to secure the area, as work is being done to help this neighborhood recover. FDNY and Con Ed are continually sweeping buildings to check gas levels, and Con Ed has shut off gas in most of the buildings as a precaution. Subway service still affected and some streets still closed off, but we're making every effort to resolve each and every one of these matters and get things back to normal for residents of the area and people who work here in the area.

On Friday after this incident, we immediately ordered all 376 crawler cranes in the city and all 53 larger tower cranes to be secured because of the wind situation. That is the total universe of cranes that could have been in operation that day. Of course many – although they were permitted to be – were not in action for other reasons, but we immediately, by my orders, secured each and every one of them.

We're now announcing a series of new policies that will take effect immediately. These policies will be in effect starting tomorrow. I want to go over four areas of new policies to ensure safety for the people of this city.

First, we are putting new restrictions on crawler cranes. Until further notice, crawler cranes must cease operation and go into safety mode whenever steady winds are forecast to exceed 20 miles an hour, or gusts are forecast to exceed 30 miles per hour. So, to be clear, even if it is a forecast in advance, we are going to require that the cranes be put into that secure mode. For example, if at the end of one work day there is a forecast for these kind of wind levels, the next work day we will require that the crane be put into the secure mode the day before. We'll send advisories to crane engineers when wind conditions warrant it, and engineers will be required to certify that they will indeed cease operations. If we don't receive this certification, we will be issuing violations and we will raise the base penalty for failure to safeguard a site from the current \$4,800 dollars to \$10,000 dollars.

Second, we'll be requiring more sidewalk protection for pedestrians. Department of Buildings, Department of Transportation, NYPD, and FDNY will all be working together on this effort. We'll be ramping up enforcement of pedestrian protections. In any situation where there will be a securing of a crane and pedestrians are not supposed to pass in the affected area, of course, we'll require the work crews to ensure that that's not happening. They are liable for violations if they do not do that, but, on top of that, we'll be sending in uniformed city personnel to ensure that pedestrians are kept safe.

Third, we'll be making sure that residents and businesses know when a crane is being moved into the secure position. Previously, operators were only required to notify the community when a crane was first installed. We will now require notification of the surrounding community when a crane is being put into a secure position. If that is happening the day – if we know that will happen the day before, the announcement will be made in advance. If it's something that has to be done on an urgent basis, they'll be required to immediately notify people in the surrounding community even as the process of securing the crane is beginning.

Fourth, we're going to leave no stone unturned in terms of learning from this accident and determining if we need other safety measures going forward. We're putting a task force to propose additional regulations and additional best practices to make sure New York City's cranes are the safest in the world. Over the next 90 days, the task force will work to evaluate Friday's collapse and to determine if we need additional safety strategies.

Friday's incident obviously is a warning that we take very seriously. We all know there is a construction boom going on in our city. And although we value the work that's being done, the value of what it means for our

economy – we value the jobs that are being created – nothing is more important than the safety of our people. So, we are going to make sure that the people of New York City are safe during this construction boom, and if we have to take strong measures to put limits on construction, we will do so. I'll state something that's obvious, but needs to be reflected in all of our laws, and rules, and regulations – there's no building that is worth a person's life. So, we'll make sure the people of this city are safe.

Very quickly in Spanish –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, I'd like you to hear from elected officials who represent this area. They've been very conscientious in following up since this incident, to make sure that their constituents are safe, and their people have been very concerned to make sure that everyone is kept safe, even as development occurs around us. First, State Senator Dan Squadron.

[State Senator Daniel Squadron speaks]

Mayor: Thank you very much, Senator. And now, Assemblymember Deborah Glick.

[Assemblymember Deborah Glick speaks]

Mayor: Thank you very much. Finally, Councilmember Helen Rosenthal.

[Councilmember Helen Rosenthal speaks]

Mayor: Thank you very much. Okay, we welcome your questions on this topic.

Question: [inaudible] the Buildings Commissioner can talk about, his inspectors were there on Thursday. When they inspected that crane, after that, they knew that the winds would be high the next day, should it have been secured on that Thursday?

Mayor: Let me clarify, from what I've understood so far, and again, I want to emphasize – we'll take every question, but I want to emphasize – full investigation underway. We're not going to speculate, because what we've found time and again is, what appears to be the cause of something can often be very, very different from when you do the full investigation. But the National Weather Service we rely on for the wind forecasts, and we'll go back and check in detail, but those forecasts, [inaudible] to my knowledge, were not evident earlier in the day Thursday, the team was there at 6:20AM Thursday. So from what I know, at 6:20AM Thursday, winds of 25 miles an hour or more were not projected for Friday. Remember, for this particular crane, 25 miles per hour was the standard. We're now surpassing that with our [inaudible] rules in going to 20 miles an hour. But to the best of my knowledge, and we will confirm with you, we did not have a wind report suggesting that in advance.

Question: And is it harder – maybe the Buildings Commissioner could talk to this – is it harder in Lower Manhattan because of the canyon effect with the buildings? Is it a different speed?

Mayor: Let me have Rick speak to that.

Commissioner Rick Chandler, Department of Buildings: I think everybody knows that with the skyscrapers in Manhattan, that wind speeds can vary by the wind tunnel effect. And in fact, we are – after the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy – we've hired some people to do a wind study throughout the city. That's our resiliency effort, it hasn't been related to cranes, but obviously we'll learn more about winds then. But we don't monitor or make note of any changes based on skyscrapers in Lower Manhattan.

Mayor: But to add to the point – very good question – because that is a potential. First of all, we’ll be looking at that potential here in the investigation. Second, the task force we’re putting together will examine that very question, of what we can do in terms of engineering studies to understand if there’s an additional impact because of a narrow street, for example, and what that might tell us differently about safety precautions in the future.

Question: Does the city plan to move forward [inaudible] that would allow for the licensing – national licensing – of crane operators [inaudible]?

Mayor: That’s an issue we’ll certainly be speaking about, but that’s not pertinent to this immediate question here. The personnel here – Rick can add – but the personnel here were all highly qualified union employees under a high level of certification.

Question: Can you just explain what types of cranes qualify as crawler cranes? And was the one involved in this incident one of those?

Commissioner Chandler: Yes, this was a crawler crane, and we’ve talked a little bit about this the last couple of days, a crawler crane is a crane that has tracks on it. I usually think of a tank, because it has those kinds of tracks, those are crawler cranes as opposed to mobile cranes. Mobile cranes have wheels, and usually are – move around more easily around the city, whereas crawler cranes are usually transported by truck.

Question: Mr. Mayor, is there any sense that this policy might have prevented other crane collapses that we’ve had in the city if this had been enacted a long time ago?

Mayor: Again, I want answers as much as you do and I want answers quickly, but what we must get is accurate answers. So I cannot speculate on what caused this specific collapse. It would not be fair to anyone until there has been a full investigation – Department of Buildings, NYPD, and again, a forensic investigation about the equipment itself. Because we literally do not know yet, would it have been the equipment? Was it the wind? Was it some other factor? Until we know, we cannot say. What we believe is these are additional important measures to put in place, based on at least some of the things we’ve initially learned.

Question: No I’m talking about previous crane collapses, from years ago.

Mayor: Again, I think you’d have to look at each and every one, because each and every one is different. I believe – I don’t want to speculate – but I believe it’s true that in the 2008 incidents there were literally mechanical issues about the equipment itself, not external factors. But each one has been different.

Question: How are crane and construction regulations [inaudible] regulations? I don’t whether these are big [inaudible] slow building or show construction [inaudible]?

Mayor: I’ll let Commissioner Chandler respond, what I would say is, I respect them, but this is something we have to do for safety and the safety of our people is paramount. Commissioner, have you had any initial response?

Commissioner Chandler: I would only add that they’ve been very, very communicative and responsive to our requests over the last few days, and I expect that that will continue.

Mayor: Okay, other questions over here?

Question: Is the task force going to look beyond crane safety to construction site safety in general? Because have been other incidents over the last several weeks and months [inaudible].

Mayor: The first focus here with this task force is the crane issue. We may make a decision to add some additional mandate, but that's what we want to focus on first. We have other announcements we'll be making shortly about construction site safety that do not involve cranes, but other things we'll be doing to beef up construction site safety – that will be coming up soon.

Question: Mayor, you said that the [inaudible] secured the crane [inaudible] –

Mayor: Say again?

Question: You said that they arrived that morning to secure the crane [inaudible].

Mayor: Commissioner?

Commissioner Rick Chandler, Department of Buildings: I would repeat the same answer. That's really speculative, and I think that that will be part of the investigation as to what might have happened, but the manufacturer clearly indicated that when you have those types of winds – that it needs to be put into safety mode, and that's what they were doing.

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: This is – you know, it's a very good question. So, again, as for all of us, we want answers and we want them quick. We do not know – was this a human element? Was it structural? Was it the equipment? Was it the wind? We don't know. But your question's very fair, and it literally goes to the new rules we're putting in place. We want the action taken the day before if we have an indication of a higher wind level. Now, remember, we've learned this all with the National Weather Service, which does a great, great job, but they do their best to keep up. Weather changes, so you could have situation where it's 5:00PM at the end of a day and there's no indication of high winds the next day, and overnight that could change. But where we have a clear indication that winds will be at 20 miles per hour or higher, we will instruct that crawler cranes to come down the night before – that's what we're saying here. Whenever we have that indication, they'll be required to come down the night before. In this instance, to the best of my knowledge – we'll go back and trace the exact hour-to-hour – if we did not have that indication, then what we at least can say with some satisfaction is the crew, upon reaching the site, and looking at the wind level, immediately did the right thing, which was to get that crane going down.

Question: [inaudible] policies that you've announced, can you talk just a little bit about what was the process in arriving at these [inaudible] policies [inaudible]?

Mayor: Sure. We immediately got together after the incident literally, you know, very nearby – had an initial conversation about what we were seeing and what is suggested. And then I instructed my team during the course of the day – Friday – to determine what immediate steps were needed. We reconvened at the end of the day – Friday – I think it was about 5 o'clock or 5:30 – and ratified a series of initial ideas, and then the team worked over the weekend to finalize them. But clearly this incident, even though we do not know the specific cause, points out that in the context of a construction boom, we want to leave no stone unturned in terms of safety. So, we wanted that task force to convene to look very, very carefully and objectively at everything that's happening related to wind. The other steps – literally we could tell we wanted to take additional steps and safeguards based on this one incident. We don't have an exact incident like this before. Let's be clear, this is particular, but if we see a particular incident that raises concerns, we have to act on them immediately. So, it literally emanated from the same-day analysis of what we saw initially in this tragedy.

Question: Has the city looked at how many days a year this new forecast restriction might affect crane construction?

Mayor: We can get you that analysis, but, from my point of view, again, safety's the paramount issue.

Question: Do you have any sense?

Mayor: We can get you that, but, you know, whether it was 10 days or 100 days, safety comes first.

Question: Can you summarize what progress has been made clearing the scene, and when you think the street might reopen?

Mayor: Let me get Joe Esposito in for that.

Commissioner Joseph Esposito, Office of Emergency Management: As of right now, you see Church Street is open. This street that you're on here – Worth Street – will be open later on today. The remaining two blocks of Worth are going to stay closed for a day or two. We have two water main leaks that we have to deal with – one on the block where the base of the crane is, and one right at the intersection of West Broadway. So, we're hoping to get some of the water back today, and the rest of it back by Tuesday.

Mayor: Okay. Thank you, everyone.

###