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New York Fire Fighters Respond in Hudson River Crash

Minutes after U.S. Airways Flight 1549 crashed shortly after takeoff into the Hudson River, Fire Department of New York (FDNY) fire fighters from the Uniformed Firefighters Association (UFA) of New York Local 94 and the Uniformed Fire Officers Association (UFOA) of New York Local 854 were on the scene working to bring the 150 passengers and five crew members to safety.

"I am truly proud of our members' dedication to the great city of New York and the people who live and visit there," says IAFF General President Schaitberger.

Flight 1549 was leaving New York's La Guardia airport for Charlotte, North Carolina, January 15, when birds knocked out both engines. The first call came to the FDNY at 3:31 p.m. Local 854 and 94 members were on scene less than five minutes later.

Time was of the essence because temperatures were at 40 degrees in the water and 21 degrees outside. Hypothermia and death were serious possibilities.

On land, other members of Local 854 and 94 were ready to assist the injured. By all reports, the rescue went off without incident. "The New York City fire fighters' bravery, dedication and training are called upon when disaster strikes," says Steve Cassidy, president of Local 94. "It is especially gratifying when all involved in a major disaster go home safely."

"The coldness of the water could have sent the passengers into cardiac arrest within five minutes," says Jack McDonnell, president of Local 854. "Clearly, there was a chance 155 people were going to die in that river, but that did not occur because of our members. This

incident demonstrated just how well-trained and well-equipped our members are."

FDNY marine crews worked quickly to get everyone off the sinking plane and onto various watercrafts from the fire department, police department, Coast Guard and the Port

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Authority of New York and New Jersey.

The following day — January 16 — New York's mayor honored all of the involved responders at City Hall.

The crash comes on the heels of a proposal to cut water rescue teams to save money because the teams do not get a high volume of calls. Fire fighters argue that emergencies and incidents like the Hudson River crash are unpredictable and demonstrate the continuous need for fire department marine resources.

Meanwhile, members of Local 854 and 94 went to New York City Hall on January 16, 2009, to try to stop four FDNY units in lower Manhattan, Brooklyn and Staten Island from shutting down between the hours of 6:00 p.m. and 9:00 a.m. New York's fire commissioner proposed the closures to save what he says is \$8.9 million per year.

Fire fighters and city council members

expressed concern that cutting services would put large areas of the City in danger when residents are asleep and most vulnerable, arguing that New York's fire fighters are already doing more with less as department resources decrease and the number of calls increases. In 1958, FDNY had 364 companies to answer 72,942 calls. In 2008, FDNY had only 357 companies to respond to 473,335 calls.

Despite the valid arguments against the nightly closures, the fire commissioner proceeded with the plan. City Council does not have authority to override the fire commissioner's budgetary decisions. ■

Union Effort

Fire fighters weren't the only union members to respond to the crash landing of US Airways Flight 1549. In fact, nearly everyone involved in the successful landing and rescue of all 155 passengers is a union member.

Chesley Sullenberger is the former safety chairman for the Air Line Pilots Association and is now represented by the U.S. Airline Pilots Association. The flight attendants, who are first and foremost safety professionals, are members of the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA. The air traffic controllers are represented by the National Air Traffic Controllers Association and the ferry crews are members of the Seafarers International Union. And the wet-suited police divers are represented by the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association. ■