

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

The Public Affairs Department helps to shape the public's understanding and perception of the Federal Reserve through working with the local and national media. During a crisis, our role is to provide relevant, timely information.

"Fifteen minutes after the second airplane crashed into the tower, the first call came into Public Affairs. 'The Fed hasn't evacuated,' the reporter yelled back to the newsroom. It was but the first of many media calls received in the hours and days following the terrorist attacks.

"My first response was to let reporters know that we were open and operating and that the Federal Reserve System stood ready to supply liquidity to any financial institution during this disruption in the markets. This message went on our Bank's web site immediately.

"My colleagues within the Fed Bank network and the Board of Governors quickly scheduled regular communication through e-mail alerts and daily conference calls. Fed Banks with operations that served the entire Fed network spoke on behalf of the System. For example, Atlanta, home to the check relay system, answered check inquiries; San Francisco acted as the source for cash distribution questions, while Boston was contacted regarding retail payments.

"Days were filled talking to officers handling front-burner issues, sitting in on Vice Chairman Ferguson's conference calls, and conferring with colleagues. We followed the same clear crisis communications guidelines that proved successful during Y2K. Individual Fed Banks handled questions about their region but referred national matters to Washington.

"Some reporters' questions were very specific. For example, Washington press wanted to know the whereabouts of Chairman Greenspan. (He was safe in

Switzerland.) In Richmond, the television media wanted to know if the same architect who designed the World Trade Towers had worked on their building. (Yes, it was.) In Philadelphia, the question was if our president had returned from giving a speech in New York the day before. (Yes, he and his staff returned on Monday.)

"Yet from San Francisco to Boston, all my public affairs peers were dealing with many of the same questions: What impact will the attack have on the economy? How are checks being transported if all airplanes are grounded? Was there plenty of cash?

"In Philadelphia, reporters called about rumors of alleged bank runs — unfounded in our District. It became important to convey that the Philadelphia Fed was prepared with plenty of cash, and the Fed stood ready to meet any nationwide unexpected cash demands.

"Our responses were closely coordinated to be consistent. We had to speak with one clear voice.

"We also had to be mindful of having consistent news reports nationwide. One low note was news from the Justice Department that several Fed Banks might have been targets for terrorists. One high note — literally — came from the New York Fed, located in the heart of Wall Street, as it played John Philip Sousa music over its outside speakers.

"From the Liberty Bell to the Golden Gate Bridge, the Federal Reserve System spoke with one strong, clear, reassuring voice during the September 11 crisis."

