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The bad feelings produced by the Bloomberg administration's disciplining of three fire officers in connection with the Deutsche Bank fire even as three separate inquiries are still in progress led a group of firefighters to refuse to meet with city lawyers prior to being questioned about the blaze by the Manhattan District Attorney's Office.

The New York Times reported Sept. 15 that the Corporation Counsel had ordered the firefighters to come to his office two hours prior to their scheduled interviews with prosecutors on Sept. 6. Interestingly, city officials did not notify Manhattan DA Robert Morgenthau of this plan.

The Times reported that there is lingering tension over the city's attempt to hold similar interviews with persons familiar with the 2003 Staten Island Ferry crash that killed 11 people, with prosecutors asserting that this "had a chilling effect on the candor of some city employees."

Presumably, the Corp. Counsel wanted to interview the firefighters with an eye toward the city's potential liability; in this case, as opposed to the ferry crash, the primary concern figures to be civil suits by the families of the two firefighters killed during the Aug. 18 blaze.

The firefighters and their union lawyers apparently concluded that city attorneys were not seeking the interviews out of concern for their well-being. Any normal suspicions along those lines in this type of case were undoubtedly stoked by the Bloomberg administration's decision to relieve three fire officers of their commands three weeks ago for allegedly not conducting safety inspections of the Deutsche Bank building prior to the fire and failing to develop a fire plan for the building.

Those three officers have all expressed eagerness to speak to the DA, giving the impression that they believe they did nothing wrong. That is still to be determined, but it has seemed curious from the outset that the administration moved so hastily against them while taking no action against anyone from the Buildings Department, which bore a greater responsibility for the ongoing demolition of the Deutsche Bank structure.

It is our guess that the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation - which was the building's owner - and the contractor, Bovis Lend Lease, and subcontractor, John Galt Corporation, will all wind up being held far more culpable than the disciplined fire officers when the probes are completed.

Given the way the administration prematurely - and possibly wrongly - came down on the fire officers, it is no surprise that the firefighters concluded they were better off speaking to the DA without prior "help" from city lawyers.

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