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Families can file death certificates before bodies recovered

NEW YORK (CNN) -- Two weeks after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, the city is making arrangements for families of the missing to file death certificates before their loved ones' bodies are recovered.

Pro bono attorneys will help the family members compile data to prove their relation and that their relative was in the World Trade Center at the time of the attacks. "If you know that your husband or father or relative was working there, and you've come to terms with the idea that they're dead and they're not going to be recovered, then you can make the choice -- and it's your choice -- to apply for the death certificate," Mayor Rudy Giuliani said.

Some 6,398 people are missing from the attacks, Giuliani said Tuesday. The number declined slightly as city officials examined the list of names and discovered duplicates. Workers have recovered the bodies of 279 people, 209 of which have been identified, Giuliani said.

Meanwhile, the search effort at the disaster site is measured more in debris than the number of people found alive. "We're losing time. Time is working against us," said Joe Allbaugh, director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). "I think we all pray and hope for a miracle, but this morning we're about to mark two weeks, and it's highly unlikely we're going to find anyone alive."

Though emergency crews are still conducting a "rescue" operation, the mayor said that "realities are just realities." "I know that this is a very painful and difficult process," Giuliani said. "We just have to begin this process, and we thought the best way to do it is to just leave it up to the families."