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TERRORIST ATTACKS

Hijackers May Have Used Handcuffs

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Investigators have recovered a pair of severed hands bound together with plastic handcuffs from the World Trade Center debris, police sources said Friday.

If confirmed as originating from a victim on one of the planes, the discovery would shed new light on the hijackers' operations, indicating they may have handcuffed passengers or the flight crew as a way to maintain control of the planes as they flew toward the towers.

Federal officials have said that the hijackers used plastic knives and box cutters to take control of the plane, and stabbed flight attendants in an effort to gain access to the cockpit. But it has been unclear how the hijackers, who apparently did not have firearms, were able to maintain control of dozens of passengers.

Federal officials said they are less optimistic that they will be able to recover the black boxes - the three voice and data recorders - intact from the Trade Center wreckage. The voice and data recorders from the Pennsylvania crash have been found.

"They were not built to sustain that type of impact between the weight of the collapse and the heat of the fire," a police source said. "They don't really believe that unless they get them out of the building that the black boxes will be intact enough for any use."

Police sources said the severed hands were found on the roof of a building near the collapse site. The hands were cataloged Friday at the medical examiner's office at 30th Street and First Avenue, which is the main facility for the painful and painstaking process of identifying the dead and establishing the cause of death. Other bodies and body parts are being brought to temporary morgues.

Plastic handcuffs, often known as "Flex-Cuffs," are widely used by law enforcement agencies, particularly during large-scale protests. In recent years, airlines began to carry plastic handcuffs as a way to restrain disruptive passengers.

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