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Employees: Green contractor cult-like

amNewYork
exclusive

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An organization that raises money for Greenpeace and other groups around the city has a cult-like atmosphere and is more obsessed with cash than the non-profits it represents, according to current and past employees.

The Fund for Public Interest Research, a Boston-based nonprofit with offices in 68 cities, hires idealistic young men and women to solicit donations for a slew of left-leaning advocacy groups such as Greenpeace, the Sierra Club and Save the Children. But the aim of the \$25 million organization is solely about money and obedience, workers told amNewYork. "I started seeing it wasn't necessarily about the cause. The focus was the quota," former employee Christopher Ravel, 23, said. "It didn't matter how you brought them in, as long as you brought them in."

Ravel said he answered an ad offering jobs "working with Greenpeace." At the fund's Midtown office in the Pennsylvania Hotel, Ravel said he was shown Greenpeace videos and taught the Greenpeace sales



Employees of a non-profit that raises money for Greenpeace claim they are forced to work in a cult-like atmosphere.

pitch. It wasn't until later, he realized, that the fund was a contractor.

Employees said they make \$42 a day plus a \$30 commission for each new member they sign up. Their quota is two new people a day and they have daily training sessions to perfect their pitch — including hour-long sessions on how to wave. Sales, not issues, are discussed and directors

demand total obedience.

Emily Berensen, the fund's recruitment director, told amNewYork, "A lot of people have really incredible experiences working with us, I'm sorry some people don't enjoy their jobs."

Berensen would not say what percentage of the money was kept by the fundraising organization and what percent goes to the actual charities

and groups. Fund workers approach people on the sidewalk and go door to door. One day they may pitch for Greenpeace and the next day for Save the Children. If they fail to meet the quota they are quickly fired. They are forbidden to question their directors and turnover is high.

Chad Albright, another former employee, said the workers often warn the new employees, "Don't drink the Kool-Aid," referring to the infamous 1978 Jonestown cult massacre.

"They have a rap to say 'don't go to college, if you can stay a little while longer it will help the cause,'" Albright said, and added the fund "is damaging the reputation of wonderful organizations."

Rick Gentry, Greenpeace USA's fundraising manager, said since 2000 the fund has brought in 100,000 new members, with 70,000 coming from New York. He described street solicitations as a "tough, crappy job" but extremely effective. He said he never heard allegations of cult-like behavior.

Lewis Fein, a spokesman for Public Interest Watch, an organization critical of Greenpeace, said of the fund, "They are doing what cults do. They don't pay you, work you to death, you are sleep-deprived, then you burn out and they replace you."

Sept. 11's lessons

Report: Agencies should have communicated better

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But the report also noted shortcomings, such as the decision not to evacuate the South Tower as soon as the North Tower was hit.

The report also said the city's 911 system failed because desperate callers received busy signals and operators did know to tell desperate callers that the FDNY gave orders to evacuate at 8:57 a.m. and roof rescues were impossible.

The report also said different first responding agencies should have had better communication, noting that "the FDNY and NYPD each considered itself operationally autonomous."

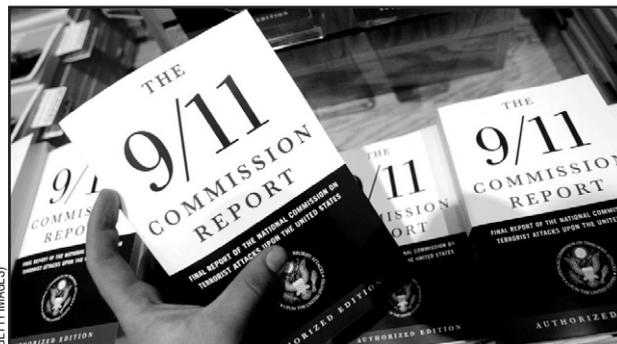
It also criticized the FDNY radios, noting their effectiveness was reduced in the high

rise buildings, too many people used the same channel overwhelming it, and that some firefighters were on the wrong channel or did not have radios at all.

"We conclude that the technical failure of FDNY radios, while a contributing factor, was not the primary

cause of the many firefighter fatalities in the North Tower," the report said.

The chapter concludes with a chilling admonition: "The lesson of 9/11, for civilians and first responders, can be stated simply: In the new age of terror, they — we — are the primary targets."



Copies of "The 9/11 Commission Report" on sale at Borders Books.

Specific proposals for New York City

New York City should adopt a military-style signal corps to handle communications in a crisis and should clarify its chain of command, the 9/11 commission recommended yesterday in a final report.

The independent commission's 567-page report faulted some aspects of the city's emergency response structure while also saying the federal government should change its homeland security funding formula to give more money to cities under high threat of terror attacks. Commissioner John Lehman said the city should learn from the example of military units that have been dealing with communications questions for decades.

The commission also voiced support for the city's long-running bid to get federal security dollars distributed on the basis of threat.

(AP)