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Four-Story Building Collapses on East Side of Manhattan

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
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NEW YORK (AP) -- A four-story building on Manhattan's East Side went up in flames and collapsed Monday after what witnesses said was a thunderous explosion that rocked the neighborhood.

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CNN

An explosion was heard before a fire and collapse at a four-story building on Manhattan's East Side on Monday, the Fire Department said.

The cause was not immediately known, but the White House said there was no indication of terrorism. Television reports said people were trapped inside, but fire officials did not immediately confirm that.

Authorities said two civilians were transported to New York Hospital, and one firefighter suffered neck and back injuries and was taken to a hospital.

Heavy black smoke rose high above the building, wedged between taller structures on 62nd Street between Park and Madison Avenues just a few blocks from Central Park. Damage, including shattered windows, could be seen at one of the adjoining buildings.

Yaakov Kermaier, 36, a resident in a building next door, said he was outside when he heard "a deafening boom. I saw the whole building explode in front of me."

"Everybody started running, nobody knew what was coming next," he said. His nanny and newborn escaped from their next-door apartment unharmed.

The four-alarm fire was reported at 8:40 a.m., and hundreds of firefighters rushed to the scene. They were seen picking through the wreckage less than an hour after the fire.

Lt. Eugene Whyte said the building included two doctor's offices, and one of the doctors has been accounted for.

The power company Con Edison said they were on the scene at a building next door -- responding to a report from a gas customer -- when the blast occurred.

TV host Larry King, who had been in his hotel room nearby, described the explosion to CNN as sounding like a bomb and feeling like an earthquake.

"I've never heard a sound like that," King said.

Thad Milonas, 57, was operating a coffee cart across from the building when he said the ground shook and the building came down.

"In a few seconds, finished," Milonas said. "The whole building collapsed."

He said he saw at least four injured people, including two bleeding women he helped from the scene.

Streets around the area were closed off to traffic as ambulances and rescue units responded just before 9 a.m. Dozens of onlookers stood behind police tape watching the smoke as it engulfed the Manhattan sky.

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