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## WTC scrap melted near al-Qaida site

### The Associated Press

**BANTING, Malaysia** - In a twist of commercial fate, metal chunks from New York's fallen twin towers are being melted and recycled at a Malaysian factory - an hour's drive from a site where some of the Sept. 11 hijackers plotted.

At the huge mill in Banting, outside Malaysia's largest city, Kuala Lumpur, shredded pieces of World Trade Center steel are among scrap headed for furnaces to be rolled into coils of flat steel, a base product used to make automobile panels and pipe, among other products.

Tons of metal from the collapsed towers were sold to scrap yards in New Jersey, which then sold the debris to recyclers in the United States and overseas. The yards say the scrap has ended up in India, Japan, South Korea, China and Malaysia.

There is no suggestion that the delivery of trade center scrap to Malaysia is anything more than irony. One town over from the mill lies an apartment where senior al-Qaida figures, including two Sept. 11 hijackers, met before the attacks.

The apartment is a recurring site in several strands of evidence in the investigation of the Sept. 11 plot, and ties in to the exposure of an Islamic extremist network in Southeast Asia with al-Qaida links.

The apartment in Kajang, about 25 miles from the mill, is owned by a former Malaysian army captain who let senior al-Qaida figures use it for a meeting in January 2000. Those at the meeting included Khalid al-Mihdhar and Nawaf al-Hazmi, who 20 months later hijacked the plane that crashed into the Pentagon.

Authorities allege the former captain, Yazid Sufaat, is a member of Jemaah Islamiyah, an Islamic group that officials allege has cells in Indonesia and the Philippines and plotted to bomb the U.S. Embassy and other targets in Singapore.

Despite a government crackdown on Islamic militants, linking Malaysia and the Sept. 11 attacks is an extremely sensitive topic in this moderate, predominantly Muslim country that has become one of Asia's fastest-developing nations and is home to the world's tallest skyscrapers, the Petronas Twin Towers.

Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad denounced the Sept. 11 attacks and international terrorism, but he also carefully maintains his support for Arab allies and his criticism of Western economic domination.

Most Malaysians also condemn the attacks, but many oppose U.S.-led military action against Muslims, such as that in Afghanistan. Also, a fundamentalist minority have strong sympathies for Islamic extremists, including Osama bin Laden.

Megasteel Sdn. Bhd., a subsidiary of the Lion Group - one of Malaysia's largest conglomerates, refused to talk to The Associated Press on the record about the World Trade Center scrap at its plant, or to answer written questions.

Company executives and government officials confirmed that Megasteel took delivery last month of a 35,000-ton shipment of scrap metal that included some World Trade Center steel.

"It was a very insignificant amount," one executive said, saying the metal came from various U.S. locations and had no special markings to distinguish World Trade Center pieces.

Megasteel blends scrap metal with clean raw material to produce huge coils of hot-rolled steel. That is used to manufacture such products as street lamp posts, shells for television sets, refrigerators and washing machines.

The company that filled Megasteel's order, Hugo Neu Schnitzer East, of

Jersey City, N.J., said it handled 250,000 tons of World Trade Center scrap and shipped it to 11 countries, including Malaysia, China, South Korea and Japan.

The firm's general manager, Bob Kelman, said debris from the twin towers was sliced into pieces with industrial guillotines or blow torches and thrown in with other scrap before being shipped.

But the twin towers scrap was distinctive because it was "the heaviest steel ever used in a building," with some from the exterior skeleton of the towers in sections 2 feet thick, he said.

"I couldn't estimate what's gone to Malaysia," Mr. Kelman said. "We don't really know what has gone to any country."

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Archives - Free	Golf	Comics & Games	Deals	Message Boards	
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Traffic	Video	Blogs			
Weather					
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<b>OBITUARIES</b>	Home & Garden	Markets			
Obituaries	Food	Stocks			
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Kentucky	Moms	Career News			
	Dating	Real Estate News			
	HYPE	HYPE			
	Deals	Blogs			



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