

Speaker 1 ([00:00](#)):

Welcome to "Prep Talk," the emergency management podcast. Find out what you need to know about preparedness. Get all the latest tips from experts in the field and learn what to do before the next disaster strikes. From the Emergency Management Department in the city that never sleeps, here are your hosts, Omar Bourne and Allison Pennisi.

Omar Bourne ([00:27](#)):

Hello everyone. Thank you for listening. I'm Omar Bourne.

Allison Pennisi ([00:31](#)):

I'm Allison Pennisi and you are our listeners and, as always, we thank you for joining us. We want you to come back as often as you can so feel free to listen to "Prep Talk" on your favorite podcast provider. You can also follow us on social media, on our Twitter @nycemergencymgt, Facebook, Instagram, and much more.

Omar Bourne ([00:51](#)):

Allison, it is summertime here in the city and you know it, it's my favorite season and favorite time of the year.

Allison Pennisi ([01:00](#)):

I know we are loving it, Omar, but with summer comes hurricane season. And while summer may look a little different this year as we navigate through the ever-challenging COVID-19 pandemic, it's important we stay prepared.

Omar Bourne ([01:13](#)):

That's right, Allison, and while Atlantic hurricane season officially began on June 1, here in New York City, we are most likely to be impacted by a coastal storm sometime between August and October, November. So, we like to say here in New York City that August 1st is our official beginning to the hurricane season.

Allison Pennisi ([01:35](#)):

Right, and thankfully, here to discuss this year's coastal storm season is New York City Emergency Management's deputy commissioner of readiness, Jacob Cooper. As deputy commissioner, he oversees our agency's readiness for coastal storms and hurricanes. Jake actually has been on our show before to talk about the city's planning for planned events, such as the New York City Marathon. So, Jake, welcome back to the show.

Jacob Cooper ([02:00](#)):

Thanks for having me back. I'm surprised you guys invited me back, but thanks.

Omar Bourne ([02:06](#)):

It's all about your expertise, Jake, so we're happy to have you back.

Jacob Cooper ([02:09](#)):

That's great.

Omar Bourne ([02:10](#)):

It's hurricane season. Right off the bat, what can people do to prepare for the season?

Jacob Cooper ([02:17](#)):

It's a good question, Omar. I would point to three things. The first thing I would do is people really should know if they live in an evacuation zone. First and foremost, find out if you're one of the people that live in one of our six zones and to do that go to [NYC.gov/knowyourzone](https://www.nyc.gov/knowyourzone), or call 311, and that can tell you if you're actually in an evacuation zone and if you would have to leave during a coastal storm. The second thing you can do, another really simple thing is to sign up for Notify NYC. You can also do that at [NYC.gov](https://www.nyc.gov) and that way you can get all the latest emergency alerts.

Jacob Cooper ([02:53](#)):

It's one of the best ways that we communicate with the public to give them the latest and the greatest. And then the third thing, and it makes it more complicated in COVID, is people really should make a plan now with their family what they're going to do in the event of a coastal storm. Come up with your family plan. And I would say with COVID you want to double-check your family plan and make sure where your... The best thing to do is stay with friends and family, but make sure that can still happen, and then have a contingency plan in case that doesn't work out for whatever reason. So those are three simple things. I would do them now. I would not wait for a storm to be coming up the coast to do that. I would just go ahead and take those simple steps. Do the planning now, and it'll save you a lot of trouble later on.

Allison Pennisi ([03:41](#)):

I'm happy that you brought up COVID-19. What are some extra steps that people can take this year in light of the pandemic?

Jacob Cooper ([03:49](#)):

I think good additions to your go bag this year would be additional face coverings because you're going to want to have your own face coverings for you and your family, and also plenty of hand sanitizer. So, those are two simple things you can add to your existing go bag to help deal with COVID.

Omar Bourne ([04:07](#)):

Now, Jake, you've been with New York City Emergency Management for over a decade, and you've seen and worked through hurricanes. Irene comes to mind. Sandy, obviously. So what are some of the challenges of planning for coastal storms, especially here in New York City?

Jacob Cooper ([04:27](#)):

Coastal storms are hugely challenging. I think when you're dealing with a city of 8.6 million people, almost 3 million of those people live in evacuation zone, protecting the life and property of that many people, 3 million-plus, is a huge task. So, our coastal storm plan is our largest planning suite, I would say with evacuation, hospital evacuation, sheltering, feeding, all the logistics plans that go into that. And so it's a complex plan and it has a lot of moving pieces. We drill it every year, but it's a high consequence

event for New York City as we've seen during Hurricane Sandy. So, when you're dealing with that many people and the mass care of that many people, it's incredibly challenging.

Allison Pennisi ([05:18](#)):

The last major coastal storm or hurricane that has affected New York City is Hurricane Sandy, as we mentioned. So, Jake, can you talk about some of the ways that Hurricane Sandy had affected the way that we have planned for and responded to coastal storms and hurricanes here in New York City?

Jacob Cooper ([05:34](#)):

Sure. Yeah, it's a good question. There have been a number of changes that have occurred since Hurricane Sandy that made the city more resilient. I think the biggest change is you're going to see our agency and the City out in the community faster and more visible. I think we learned after Sandy we need to be on the ground helping coordinate the field response and really in the communities. And I think you'll see that, with our field response will be enhanced and there'll also be community recoveries to help sort of communicate with community, understand the issues and problems that are there. That's a huge change. On the external affairs side, I think we also have better tools and protocols that we're going to use this time around. I think about Notify NYC, which I think existed at the time, but I think we've really gotten better on how to use that and the ways we can really enhance communication.

Jacob Cooper ([06:29](#)):

And then, obviously, the growth of social media, which is a great tool to communicate with the public. So, on the external affairs side, I feel like we're stronger. There's also been infrastructure improvements. I think they learned. The building code has changed particularly for high rises and things where more mechanicals are on the roof, the utility infrastructure should be more resilient. That'll help. And then I think also we've gotten much better with commodities distribution, in particular, food. I mean, you see what's going on now with COVID with the whole food distribution, the Get Food program that we're helping work with sanitation on. It's amazing the amount of meals that are going out. So, that's a big improvement. We also have these new emergency contracts that are in place to be able to use... Get resources quickly moving for all sorts of things.

Jacob Cooper ([07:20](#)):

And then, interim flood protection, IFPM program. This is putting up different, various types of barriers to slow down water inundation. Those things, you put all those things together and I think we're more mature in our operation and planning than we were during Hurricane Sandy, and we've made those improvements to help response.

Omar Bourne ([07:45](#)):

When we look at the City and the Emergency Operations Center, that is usually activated prior to a significant emergency or prior to an emergency. Obviously, we are looking at a time where we are social distancing. I know the Emergency Operations Center has been activated virtually this summer. So, what does that look like and how are our partners adapting to the change?

Jacob Cooper ([08:16](#)):

Yeah, it's a good question. So, we've had plenty of practice to work on working virtually in an emergency operation center, which is something that was pretty new to us, but we were sort of forced to do because of COVID.

Jacob Cooper ([08:30](#)):

I mean, we'll always have a small footprint here at our command center, but we've actually had, like you said, we've had a few heat activations that have been all virtual. So we're able to use different technology to sort of communicate with the agency partners and share information happening in real-time and be in constant communication with them. And so we've been able to do that pretty effectively, I think, for heat. We also exercise that... As you know, I oversee exercises. So one of the things we like to do is to test these things out. We have been doing some virtual exercises. But more importantly, I think on a day to day basis, because we've been running with a smaller footprint here in the office, people, our agency, and other agencies have learned to adapt to work remotely and we're becoming more and more effective at that.

Jacob Cooper ([09:27](#)):

So, I don't think you'll be a hundred percent virtual, but we are going to run with a much smaller footprint here, and I think we'll be just as effective.

Omar Bourne ([09:37](#)):

Wonderful. I have one last question here, Jake. When we talk about evacuating, there are some people who may not have a family member or friend in which they can shelter. And so they may have to visit one of the City's hurricane evacuation centers. Obviously, we know there is COVID. So can we talk a little bit about some of the social distancing and the changes that people will see at the hurricane evacuation centers to ensure their safety when it comes to maybe having to visit one of these centers?

Jacob Cooper ([10:11](#)):

Yeah. I mean, ideally, we want people to stay with friends and family, but we know that's not always going to work out for whatever reason and that people are going to have to use our shelters. I think pretty early on in the COVID pandemic, we recognized that this was going to be here a while and we were going to have to make some adaptations to our planning efforts, particularly on the sheltering side. So our cascading impacts team working with human services started to look at our sheltering plan. And I think the greatest change was what you said, Omar, is this is the social distancing. And so we started to expand the footprint in our shelters, started to see how we could tape things out, use different space within our shelters so that people could stay six feet apart. We know we still have the same amount of capacity by making those adaptations. And so, if people do go to our shelter, we've made a number of changes that you would see.

Jacob Cooper ([11:16](#)):

The biggest one is that cots and people will be placed six feet apart. Additionally, we made changes to the way we'll be serving food at shelters, where we will be doing sort of grab and go model, and people eat back where they're sleeping instead of a congregate cafeteria type setting. And then also if someone comes into the shelter and they're exhibiting symptoms or we're not sure, we'll have an isolation area where they'll be able to assess and then figure out what the best sheltering option for that person would be at that time. Two other quick things is like we're doing enhanced cleaning of our shelters to keep them clean, and then finally, obviously, you're going to need to wear a mask in a shelter. And if

people don't bring masks, we'll provide a mask for them. Obviously, we want people to bring their own, but if they can't, we'll have masks. So those are the biggest changes I would say towards the sheltering side of things to make those shelters safe in light of COVID.

Allison Pennisi ([12:16](#)):

We're talking to New York City Emergency Management deputy commissioner, Jake Cooper, about hurricane season here in New York City. Rapid Response is up next, but first, here's a message from New York City Emergency Management.

Speaker 5 ([12:28](#)):

I first found out that I lived in a zone prior to Hurricane Sandy. I felt my entire family was in danger. During the storm, it was catastrophic. My neighborhood received a tremendous amount of damage. Unfortunately, we had loss of life in that portion of Staten Island. You need to have a plan for your family. Anything could happen at any time.

Speaker 6 ([12:49](#)):

New Yorkers have the power to be prepared for hurricanes. Know your zone. Have a plan.

Speaker 7 ([12:57](#)):

It's time for "Prep Talk" Rapid Response.

Allison Pennisi ([13:03](#)):

All right. It is Rapid Response time, and if you are a first-time listener, it's simple. Omar and I will ask questions and our guest will give the first answer that comes to mind. Okay, Jake, what is the one emergency item you cannot live without?

Jacob Cooper ([13:18](#)):

And I can't say my running shoes, right? That's not acceptable, right, Allison?

Allison Pennisi ([13:24](#)):

It could be acceptable, but if you have another item, we will take that as well.

Jacob Cooper ([13:28](#)):

Okay. So, in all seriousness, I would say cash. I'd say cash is king. People should have a little bit of cash on hand and different denominations. You can always find a use for cash.

Allison Pennisi ([13:41](#)):

Great answer.

Omar Bourne ([13:42](#)):

Good answer, Jake. What is the one thing you want listeners to know about personal preparedness?

Jacob Cooper ([13:47](#)):

This transcript was exported on Aug 17, 2020 - view latest version [here](#).

A little bit of planning goes a long way. So just take a little bit of time now to do those things I talked about, like sign up for Notify NYC, and know your zone, make a plan with your family. But a little bit of forward planning will help a lot in an emergency.

Allison Pennisi ([14:03](#)):

All right, Jake, final question. Sum up the work you do in one word.

Jacob Cooper ([14:07](#)):

A lot of words I could choose, but I'm going to say dynamic.

Allison Pennisi ([14:11](#)):

Great answer. Speaking with New York City Emergency Management deputy commissioner, Jacob Cooper. For our listeners, it is hurricane season. It is well underway here in New York City. And, as a reminder, we want you to be prepared and stay safe. Visit NYC.gov/knowyourzone or call 311 to find out whether you live in a hurricane evacuation zone. Make your plan and stay informed.

Speaker 1 ([14:40](#)):

That's this episode of "Prep Talk." If you like what you heard, you can listen to anytime online or through your favorite RSS feed. Until next time, stay safe and prepared.