

Speaker 1 ([00:04](#)):

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.

Christina Farrell ([00:24](#)):

Hello everyone. Thank you for listening. I'm Christina Farrell

Allison Pennisi ([00:27](#)):

And I'm Allison Pennisi, and you are our listeners. 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, LinkedIn, and much more.

Christina Farrell ([00:47](#)):

Three New York City Emergency Management staff members and a member of the New York City Police Department recently deployed to Puerto Rico to provide emergency preparedness training to senior leaders in San Juan. They also met with leaders in Peñuelas to discuss how the municipality is recovering after the 2020 earthquake.

Allison Pennisi ([01:08](#)):

Here to discuss the City's partnership with Puerto Rico and key takeaways from these efforts are Henry Jackson, chief operating officer at New York City Emergency Management, and Yokarina Duarte, director of intergovernmental relations at New York City Emergency Management, both of whom were part of this effort. Thank you both for being here.

Yokarina Duarte ([01:26](#)):

Thank you, Allison, for inviting us.

Allison Pennisi ([01:28](#)):

Thank you. Let's get right into it. Can you each talk to us about this partnership, including how it came to be and the goals of this work? Yokarina, let's start with you.

Yokarina Duarte ([01:38](#)):

Sure. It all started back in 2017 when Puerto Rico was going to get hit by hurricane category five, named Maria. The mayor of San Juan had reached out to Mayor de Blasio requesting assistance to help San Juan. It was an interesting request because usually mutual aid requests are done through a system called Emergency Management Assistant Compact, which determined the logistic for our deployments. This was actually the first time that we were doing a city-to-city agreement, and we were unclear what the needs that San Juan had at the moment, and the challenges that they were facing after getting hit by the hurricane. As for me, I remember that the agency sent out a survey around asking employee who would like to go down to Puerto Rico to assist. I put my name down on the list, but I was not picked initially, however, they needed someone bilingual, someone who could be a liaison between the team

and the mayor. I met both criteria. From there, I only had three days to pack my bag and leave everything organized for my team that I was leaving behind in New York City.

Henry Jackson ([02:37](#)):

Thanks Yoka. As Yokarina mentioned, we first got down there because of the mayor-to-mayor agreement with the impending impact of Hurricane Maria. It was an unusual way to do this. There's an expression in the industry that you don't want to exchange business cards in the middle of an emergency, and that's what we did. We went down with an undefined mission. We met with the mayor. I went with a bunch of folks on that first trip to frame what the work was that we were going to do. We did that during Maria and the trip now is really to do it the right way, is to start to plan with folks before the emergency happens so we understand who the players are, we understand how they operate, and we can be more effective in the future when we come down to help. That's always been the goal, is really just to help out.

Christina Farrell ([03:32](#)):

Thank you. It's always interesting when we go back in time and remember. I had forgotten about that survey and about Yokarina being like "I'm leaving in two days". Time certainly flies. As you both mentioned, you have, along with some others in our agency, have supported recovery efforts that affected Puerto Rico, first with the hurricane almost four years ago now, and then you both served as members of the advanced team following the January 2020 earthquake, which were only about 18 months ago, but with everything that has gone on in New York City and Puerto Rico and the world, it might as well be another lifetime. As Henry said, you now have had the opportunity to go down in a much organized fashion and to do some training, some preparedness efforts and exercises on the island. Could you talk to us a little bit about how your experiences working these three different times in Puerto Rico have changed your perspective of the field?

Yokarina Duarte ([04:38](#)):

Sure. I will say that it's not the same when you land on the island that was just hit by a hurricane cat four, and then you go back again to help during an earthquake. Even if you go to do some training on a nice, beautiful day, it is three different experiences for sure. Even on a personal level, I am Dominican, I have experienced many hurricane on the island, nevertheless, the earthquake that I felt while being in Guayanilla doing an assessment on a convent was a completely new experience for me. Certainly for Puerto Ricans in the island, when you know a hurricane might hit, you know when it might hit and you prepare, if I have some time to prepare in advance, but a lot of people when I saw when the next tremor for the earthquake was going to occur, how bad it was going to be the next time.

Yokarina Duarte ([05:30](#)):

Once you experienced that, you have it in your mind, you're clear that once you complete this mission, Puerto Rico was going to need much more to be better prepared for the next emergency. This is when training comes in handy, you want to plan ahead and test your plan and find the flaws in your plan so you can make it better for the next emergency. That's exactly what we're trying to help them with doing the training. It was a great idea because both Henry and I had been deployed to this different deployment. We have the expertise and we saw what went wrong and what worked. For us to go back to this new administration and say, hey, during Maria this work, during the earthquake, this didn't work. We saw you in action and it didn't work. How about you guys think outside of the box and be more proactive on this area, on that area, and you think about this plan ahead of a time, and you look at this

plan ahead of a time so you make sure your employees are ready, was kind of new and refreshing, at least for us while being on the training.

Henry Jackson ([06:37](#)):

Yes. To follow up on that a little bit, it was a much different kind of work than we're used to doing. I've spent 20 years working in the City of New York. That's our jurisdiction, we don't usually get out of the jurisdiction that often. Often we're sitting in a big room in a big emergency operation center, coordinating with the City agencies and finding problems and making decisions and implementing them. Going down to Puerto Rico, we had a lot more infield work. We were a lot closer to the problems than we are in New York when we're sitting in our big room. That really did change my perspective on the field a little bit. That's really what the work is all about, is getting people back from where they were.

Henry Jackson ([07:29](#)):

The other thing that resonated with me is that cities have the same problems. I think the reason we do well in these mayor to mayor partnerships is because we're used to working for mayors, and cities have unique problems and unique challenges and unique resources. We saw that, even working in San Juan. Even with the fragility of their infrastructure and the real work that needs to be done down there for resilience, but it was really an eye opening part of my career.

Yokarina Duarte ([08:03](#)):

Also, I think it is important, right? We always say here in New York City, that emergency management is a discipline that we practice here in New York City, but is really beyond borders. Like you said, we can always bring this expertise to different part that is needed. That's always great, and we are so glad to be giving the opportunity to assist when needed and be able to provide the resources and information so they can be better prepared.

Henry Jackson ([08:29](#)):

Exactly. I was able to cross off earthquake from my disaster bucket list.

Allison Pennisi ([08:36](#)):

We always say that we are constantly learning in this field. Thank you both. As you mentioned, this actually isn't the first time the City has deployed staff to another municipality. Back in June 2010, during the recovery from a devastating earthquake, there was an 11 member team from New York City Emergency Management, the fire department, and the health department that traveled to Port-au-Prince, Haiti, to help create a local community emergency response team program. We've even had collaborations where other municipalities have taught New York City a thing or two, important lessons on emergency preparedness. For example, we recently had the Oklahoma City Office of Emergency Management share tornado preparedness tips with New York City residents through a webinar hosted by our Ready Up NYC webinar series. I've also helped out with things relating to response and recovery. With this, can you each share why mutual aid and partnerships are so important, and what lessons you both have learned as emergency managers. Henry let's start with you.

Henry Jackson ([09:42](#)):

Sure. What I've learned is, what I thought I knew, was that there's always something to learn. Every disaster is unique and you can always take something away. You never have enough experience and you

can always learn more. As I mentioned before, being closer to the ground gave me more appreciation for the goal of the operation, to get people back to where they were. I had an opportunity, we don't travel that much, occasionally we do. A few years ago to go down to Florida for a hurricane under Craig Fugate when he was running the Florida operation. I learned a lot of things about running an EOC there and about the way they communicate, and the discipline that they have inside the Florida EOC. I brought a lot of that back to me. Going somewhere, providing mutual aid, going to trainings and all those kinds of things are really important because there's always something new to learn.

Yokarina Duarte ([10:46](#)):

I agree with Henry, there's always something new that you can learn. Like in, like Henry also mentioned, we think we're different, but we're not, we're more similar than different. A lot of the things that they try to do is what we try to do here. Obviously sometimes we have more resources than other cities and that's why mutually is so important. We had to help as much as we can. I am so happy to be part of an organization and agency that is always very forward to that, very willing to always help out whether it is Puerto Rico or other states within in the United States. I think that there's always something new to learn. At least for me in Puerto Rico, I can't express how good it felt to be there, helping out and being able to know that you're making a difference and, going back for training and knowing that the administration is actually listening and that they're willing to listen to the recommendations and implement that. That's huge, that's important because it means that they're interested in the preparedness piece, which usually doesn't happen in a lot of the Caribbean countries. That's very interesting for me. That's something that I really was surprised and amazed to learn.

Christina Farrell ([12:08](#)):

It's interesting. Like Henry, I've worked for the City for a long time and we always say, oh, we're different in New York. We're special, we're this, we're that, which it is, every place is. But I think also as you meet with people and you get to know, especially within large cities, a lot of the issues, people are people and systems are systems and bureaucracy is bureaucracy. I would just give a shout out because for different disasters, certainly during Hurricane Sandy, we had mutual aids, which is through EMAC and some of the things you guys were talking about. I remember emergency managers coming in from Maine and from California, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, I'm sure lots of other places to help us out too. It does go both ways, although the threshold is a little larger in New York City. Given your experiences, what can, and what should emergency managers do throughout the disaster cycle that they may not have considered before? I know Yokarina, I'm talking a little bit about preparedness. I think sometimes especially, we're blessed with a very large emergency management department, other places it's really smaller, so preparedness may be seen more as a luxury or as a nice to have instead of a critical piece. What would your advice be to other emergency managers? Especially in smaller departments, as they are looking at the disaster cycle and, and how to really prepare and train.

Yokarina Duarte ([13:39](#)):

Definitely preparedness, but also something that I think emergency managers always forget to do is also take time for yourself whenever you have the opportunity to do it, because you don't know when the next disaster's going to be, how long it's going to be for. You definitely have to take care of yourself to be able to take care of others. That's something that sometimes we are so focused on the emergency that we forget about us and that we forget that we have a family that we also had to look out for. Take care of yourself, take care of your family, and definitely prepare as much as you can because each

disaster, you may have a plan for a disaster, but each disaster might bring you different challenges. The better prepared you are the better it's going to be for you to be able to handle the next emergency.

Henry Jackson ([14:23](#)):

That's a good one, Yokarina, I didn't have that on my list. I had learned a language. I had a lot of challenges with the language. I spent too many years taking French, I should have taken Spanish, but I'm serious about that. The other thing is, go to these conferences and go to these meetings and meet people so that you have more people that you know out there so you're not just meeting people in the middle of a disaster. And again, learning, in a way, this is one of those professions where you're constantly learning. Study different kinds of disasters on your off time. We don't usually get earthquakes, and going down to Puerto Rico made me very interested in understanding that, so I spent some time reading a couple of books about how that works. When you have downtime and you're taking care of yourself, educate yourself as well.

Allison Pennisi ([15:21](#)):

All very excellent and insightful points. Speaking with Yokarina Duarte and Henry Jackson. It is rapid response time. If you are first time listener, it's simple. 'Prep Talk' will ask questions and our guests will give the first answer that comes to mind. But before rapid response, here is a message from New York City Emergency Management.

Speaker 6 ([15:42](#)):

My name is Wes. I live in Staten Island and I live in Zone 6.. I first found out that I lived in a zone prior to Hurricane Sandy.

Speaker 7 ([15:57](#)):

A good place to start would be by visiting [NYC.gov/knowyourzone](http://NYC.gov/knowyourzone). You can find information on evacuation centers.

Speaker 8 ([16:05](#)):

There are information about how to keep your pet safe and what to pack during a hurricane, and how long typically help could arrive.

Speaker 7 ([16:16](#)):

Another tool that you can use would be signing up for the Notify NYC app. You'll get up to date information on any emergencies throughout the city.

Speaker 10 ([16:25](#)):

Notify NYC provides free alerts and updates daily.

Speaker 6 ([16:29](#)):

New Yorkers can receive emergency alerts where it matters most to them, in their workplace or anywhere they are in the city.

Speaker 7 ([16:36](#)):

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You can also follow Notify NYC via Twitter.

Speaker 10 ([16:39](#)):

Just be aware that you do have the resources to always be informed.

Speaker 7 ([16:45](#)):

New Yorkers have the power to be prepared for hurricanes.

Speaker 8 ([16:48](#)):

Know your zone. Stay informed.

Speaker 13 ([16:56](#)):

You are listening to 'Prep talk,' the emergency management podcast.

Christina Farrell ([17:02](#)):

We're back with rapid response with Henry Jackson and Yokarina Duarte. We are going to ask them a few questions. Henry and Yoka, what was your favorite part of deploying to Puerto Rico?

Yokarina Duarte ([17:04](#)):

For me, it was helping people and connecting with people that needed the help, knowing that we're making a difference in someone's life. That was rewarding for me. Making that decision of going down there, it all made sense once we were down there doing that.

Henry Jackson ([17:33](#)):

And for me, besides the food, which I love down there, it was the drive through the mountains to Peñuelas I think on our second day. It's a beautiful drive and it was a beautiful day. It reminded me of when we were there before. That was my favorite part.

Allison Pennisi ([17:51](#)):

What is your top emergency preparedness tip? Yoka.

Yokarina Duarte ([17:55](#)):

I know it sounds like we're repeating a lot, but I always say planning events. You not have the time during an emergency to gather all your things that you may need, especially if we have someone with disability at home. Plan in advance, make sure that you have everything before an emergency.

Henry Jackson ([18:13](#)):

I would say, again, not rocket science, but stay informed. You need to know what's going on, you need to know what's going on in your city. You need to know what's going on if you're traveling, you need to know what's going on with the weather. Stay informed, know what's happening, be educated.

Christina Farrell ([18:31](#)):

That sounds like a plug for Notify NYC potentially, which we will accept. Hopefully all of our listeners are signed up for Notify NYC, but if not, check it out and please get signed up. All right. To bring us home, can you sum up the work that you do in one word?

Yokarina Duarte ([18:50](#)):

I would say it's everything. There's nothing that we don't do, what I don't do. I think that I'm lucky to work for an agency that allows me to grow professionally in so many different ways, that there's always an opportunity for me to do something. I would say the word is everything. I'm blessed to be part of an organization that do allow me to do and be part of not only different emergencies but different projects. That's my word.

Henry Jackson ([19:19](#)):

I guess if I had to pick one word, it would be serve. That's what we here to do is to serve, to help people. That gets you in all sorts of places.

Allison Pennisi ([19:30](#)):

Speaking with Yokarina Duarte and Henry Jackson, thank you both. To bring it all home as Christina said, this is a field where you're constantly learning. Whether you are being deployed or if you're just preparing, continue to learn and continue to educate yourself, reach out to other emergency managers, whether it's local on the state level, federal government, even NGOs and nonprofits, this is a field where we're constantly learning and it's always good to connect with others and find out how you can help.

Christina Farrell ([20:01](#)):

Yes, thanks to you both for coming on. Thank you for all the work you've done in Puerto Rico. I suspect you have not seen the last of Puerto Rico from an emergency management standpoint. We appreciate you coming on the podcast and your willingness to give of yourselves down to help our fellow Americans, so thank you.

Henry Jackson ([20:24](#)):

My pleasure.

Yokarina Duarte ([20:24](#)):

Thank you for inviting us.

Speaker 9 ([20:30](#)):

That's this episode of 'Prep Talk.'

Speaker 1 ([20:32](#)):

If you like what you heard, you can listen anytime online or through your favorite RSS feed.

Speaker 9 ([20:37](#)):

Until next time, stay safe and prepared.