

Speaker 1: [00:01](#) 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: [00:30](#) And I'm Alison 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 Twitter @nycemergencymgt, Facebook, Instagram, and much more.

Omar Bourne: [00:48](#) On this episode we are highlighting preparedness for older adults. We will be chatting with representatives from New York City Emergency Management and the Department for the Aging, and the managing director of SelfHelp Community Services, the senior center that won this year's Senior Center of the Year Award from NYC Emergency Management.

Allison Pennisi: [01:08](#) That's right, Omar. Now preparing older adults for emergencies is a priority for both New York City Emergency Management and the Department for the Aging. Our special guests will talk about the resources available to older New Yorkers.

Allison Pennisi: [01:19](#) But before we dive in, you know what time it is. Let us get you updated on the latest news in the emergency management field.

Speaker 4: [01:28](#) Here's your "Prep Talk" Situation Report.

Allison Pennisi: [01:32](#) All right, this is the Situation Report. Let's get started. The world's average temperature is rising faster than previously thought. According to the World Meteorologic Organization, the world's average temperature may increase by five to nine degrees Fahrenheit by the end of the century. Experts say an increase of that magnitude would trigger vast changes to the environment, including ice vanishing from both the North and South poles, extreme flooding due to rising sea levels, and irreversible loss of diversity among plants and animals. But we may not have to wait until the end of the century. Scientists say this year will probably be the second or third warmest year for global temperatures on record.

Omar Bourne: [02:13](#) Thank you, Allison. In other news, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA, recently released its Annual National Preparedness Report. The report evaluates annual preparedness progress and challenges facing the whole community from terrorism and active shooter incidents to cyber attacks and natural disasters. Now the report also points to a number of improvements made by federal, state, and local governments. You can access the report by logging on to fema.gov.

Allison Pennisi: [02:46](#) Okay, and that is the Situation Report. Still to come, we will be talking with Ed Powell, community engagement coordinator at New York City Emergency Management, and Ben Strong, senior director for emergency preparedness at the Department for the Aging. And later we'll sit down with Mayer Waxman, the Managing Director for SelfHelp Community Services.

Allison Pennisi: [03:04](#) But first, here's a public service announcement from New York City Emergency Management and the Ad Council.

Speaker 5: [03:11](#) Your daughter doesn't want to talk about why her room is a horrible mess. Your son doesn't want to talk about why he's wearing mismatching socks. Your spouse doesn't want to talk about their bad haircut. Families don't have to talk about everything, but they should talk to plan for an emergency.

Speaker 5: [03:33](#) Pack basic supplies in a Go Bag. Water, canned food, flashlights, batteries, medical supplies, IDs, and some cash. Talk about where you'll meet in case you lose one another. And of course, don't forget to pack the dog treats.

Speaker 5: [03:51](#) Talk to your family and make an emergency plan. Go to nyc.gov/readyny, or call 311 to make your family's emergency plan.

Speaker 5: [04:04](#) Brought to you by New York City Emergency Management and the Ad Council.

Speaker 4: [04:12](#) You are listening to "Prep Talk," the emergency management podcast.

Omar Bourne: [04:17](#) That's right, you are listening to "Prep Talk," and we are back. Joining us for this episode are Ed Powell from New York City Emergency Management and Ben Strong from the Department for the Aging. Thank you guys for being here.

Ben Strong: [04:31](#) Thank you.

- Ed Powell: [04:31](#) It's a great pleasure.
- Omar Bourne: [04:33](#) Thank you. Ben, let's get started with you. Now many of our listeners may be unfamiliar with the Department for the Aging, so can you tell us a little about your agency, your mission statement, and what programs you have for older adults?
- Ben Strong: [04:47](#) So we're really set on empowering older adults in the city. We fund 249 older adult centers as well as support services and naturally occurring retirement communities across the city. About 30,000 New Yorkers visit older adult centers daily for wellness, cultural, and recreation activities. We also provide around 12 million meals annually at older adult centers and through home delivered meals. We also do counseling and support services through ThriveNYC Geriatric Mental Health Initiative as well as Elder Abuse Services.
- Ben Strong: [05:16](#) Another thing people may not know is that we provide paid job training for older adults and we help to support children through our Foster a Grandparent program.
- Allison Pennisi: [05:24](#) Now, Ed, New York City Emergency Management works with older adults to prepare them for emergencies. So what programs are in place to ensure that older adults know what to do when disaster strikes?
- Ed Powell: [05:36](#) Well, Allison, our Ready New York program educates all New Yorkers about how to be prepared for emergencies, including older adults. This year, New York City Emergency Management's Ready New York program hosted over 70 presentations in New York City senior centers. Many of them I did myself. About 90%, I guess. And we trained more than 5,800 older New Yorkers in preparedness.
- Omar Bourne: [06:08](#) You mentioned that you go out and you have these presentations. You give these presentations to older adults. So tell us about what that interaction with them is like and the experiences that you have just going out and helping to teach older adults about emergency preparedness.
- Ed Powell: [06:25](#) Let me start by saying there are a lot of misconceptions about older adults. A lot of people think that older adults are all weak and feeble. But when emergencies happen, older adults are often among the first individuals to recover. Experience has taught, and I'm speaking as an older adult myself, experience has taught us that the world doesn't end, things don't stop, simply because of a single emergency event. I'm 79 and I have a

beautiful 11 year old daughter. And while that might not necessarily address the question of resiliency, it totally dispels one of the other common misconceptions about older adults.

Omar Bourne: [07:21](#) And that's true because to your point people would think that when they get to a certain age that, as you said, life kind of is over, and that's not necessarily the case. I mean, I have visited a couple of the senior centers. I've visited when we've had the Senior Center of the Year Award. And we'll have a Mayer on later to talk about the award that we recently gave to his senior center. And we're talking about people who, they're in their seventies, their eighties, their nineties. They're dancing. They're playing games. They're socializing and interacting. Really dispelling the misconception. And so this is why senior preparedness is important, right?

Allison Pennisi: [08:11](#) Absolutely.

Ed Powell: [08:11](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Allison Pennisi: [08:13](#) So Ed, what specific tips should older adults keep in mind to be prepared? We know that older adults are resilient beings, but are there specific steps that you would like to educate New Yorkers about?

Ed Powell: [08:26](#) Well, one of the most important preparedness steps, I guess, is creating an emergency support network of people who will keep in touch with each other during an emergency. And that includes people who you can rely on during an emergency. It can be people from your house of worship, it can be coworkers, neighbors, relatives, friends. You know, the bottom line is no one should go through an emergency alone.

Ed Powell: [08:59](#) I recently did a presentation in Coney Island area and an elderly lady came up to me after the presentation and she said I wish I had seen this presentation prior to Sandy. She said, I was all alone. No one contacted me. I didn't have anybody else to contact. And if I had just had created a network of people who would be in touch it would have made all the difference.

Allison Pennisi: [09:31](#) I'm glad you brought up an emergency support network. It's important for people to be able to rely on each other during an emergency. You rely on someone, they can also in turn rely on you. With people who may have special medical needs or their emergency plan might require them to maybe think about things like how to get prescription medications during an

emergency or things like that, what would you say to them? Are there any special tips that people can follow?

Ed Powell: [09:58](#) Well Allison, that's a great question. It's all about working with your providers before an emergency happens. You know, whether it's a medical treatment or a home-based meal delivery, find out their emergency plan so that they can make sure that services or treatments aren't disrupted. Also, if you take prescription medications, have a plan with your doctor and your pharmacist to get emergency prescription refills.

Allison Pennisi: [10:28](#) Those are really great tips.

Omar Bourne: [10:28](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative). And Ben, we've talked a lot about providers and caregivers. So what are some of the ways that the Department for the Aging supports caregivers who work with older adults?

Ben Strong: [10:43](#) That's a really good question. We support caregivers through partnerships with community based providers in every borough. We help caregivers self-identify then obtain respite care for when they need a break. We also offer counseling and referrals to resources.

Allison Pennisi: [10:57](#) How can other states, countries, municipalities adopt the model that the Department for the Aging and New York City Emergency Management have put forth resources for people to be prepared for emergencies and to stay resilient?

Ben Strong: [11:10](#) I think New York City has one of the largest networks of senior centers out of any large municipality in the United States. So I think looking at that and looking at the social clubs and naturally occurring retirement communities, I think we set an excellent example of having these networks and it kind of helps us communicate emergency preparedness. So I think not only other emergency management organizations throughout the country can take a look at this, but other governmental and nongovernmental organizations that cater to the aging can also take a look.

Ben Strong: [11:43](#) We know that at Emergency Management, and I know from my time in emergency managements, we host delegations from all over the country and the world for meetings to discuss best practices for preparing and responding to emergency events. DFTA's Office of Emergency Preparedness is very much open to this and collaborating with Emergency Management to have these delegations come here and learn about what we do.

- Omar Bourne: [12:06](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative). And for our listeners, DFTA is a just a short way of saying Department for the Aging.
- Omar Bourne: [12:12](#) Ed, what about you? People using this as a model?
- Ed Powell: [12:15](#) The three basic steps of preparedness are adaptable to any population, any environment. For an older adult living in the Arctic or a teenager living in subtropical rain forest, planning ahead, gathering supplies and sustenance, and making oneself aware of available resources can help to prepare for emergencies no matter where you are and no matter what age or anything else.
- Allison Pennisi: [12:51](#) All right, so New York City Emergency Management and the Department for the Aging work to prepare older adults for emergencies, and one of the ways they do that is recognizing senior centers for their outstanding commitment to preparedness. And this is the Ready Senior Center of the Year Award. So talk to us about the importance of acknowledging such achievements and the inspiration that comes with these awards. Ben, let's start with you.
- Ben Strong: [13:14](#) Sure. Senior centers are really critical. They're really important in the sense that they provide a critical avenue of information to older adults. They also serve as cooling centers during heat emergencies over the summer. So they're a source, not only for older adults, but the entire city as a whole.
- Ben Strong: [13:33](#) We're able to host a number of trainings at senior centers, so we do Ready New Yorks there, and it's a great way to intimately connect with the older adults who go to those senior centers. Once you kind of make that connection, it's easier to communicate the emergency preparedness information that we really need to get out to them.
- Omar Bourne: [13:51](#) Wonderful. It's about building that network. Ed, how about you?
- Ed Powell: [13:54](#) Well as Ben mentioned, senior centers do an exceptional job of engaging the community in helping to prepare older New Yorkers for emergencies and recognizing this work can also motivate the community to do more to help each other.
- Allison Pennisi: [14:12](#) We are going to take a quick break, but stay tuned, we will have more to come. Up next we have Mayer Waxman, the managing director for SelfHelp Community Services. Also this year's winner of the Ready New York Senior Center of the Year Award.

Omar Bourne: [14:25](#) And Ben and Ed, stick around, because they have to participate in rapid response.

Allison Pennisi: [14:30](#) Absolutely.

Omar Bourne: [14:30](#) They can't get off. Yeah.

Allison Pennisi: [14:32](#) Not letting you off that easy.

Omar Bourne: [14:34](#) That's right. We'll be back.

Speaker 8: [14:36](#) Make a New Year's resolution to be in the know when an emergency happens. Whether it's a storm, a mass transit delay, or an unexpected event, get free alerts from Notify NYC, New York City's free emergency communications program. Download the Notify NYC app today, visit nyc.gov or call 311. Remember a notified New Yorker is a prepared New Yorker.

Speaker 4: [15:03](#) If you don't know, now you know. You're listening to "Prep Talk," the emergency management podcast.

Omar Bourne: [15:11](#) That's right. We're back. If you don't know, you're listening to "Prep Talk." We have a special guest. Mayer Waxman, welcome to the show.

Mayer Waxman: [15:21](#) Thank you very much.

Omar Bourne: [15:23](#) Let me start by saying congratulations on winning the 2019 Ready New York Senior Center of the Year Award. So let's get right into it. What was your initial reaction when you found out that your senior center had won this year's award?

Mayer Waxman: [15:41](#) I was wowed. I felt that it's a great honor and a recognition of the hard work that the Center's director, Dr. Jane Chu and her hardworking staff have done. We're proud to offer our members robust resources for emergency readiness, and I guess it was flattering to be recognized for it.

Allison Pennisi: [16:01](#) Now can you tell us about the resources available at the Center throughout the year and how did you become involved in preparedness and also encouraging this resiliency among older adults in New York City?

Mayer Waxman: [16:13](#) I can tell you first of all that the site director, Dr. Jane Chu, has always been concerned about safety, and that's one of the integral things that we focus on in everything that we do. It's a

very active center. We're contracted to serve 340 meals a day, and realistically we have closer to 500 people being served in a limited space. So there's always the risk of something happening and we take all precautions to make sure it never does. So with that mindset, safety's always been a huge concern.

Mayer Waxman: [16:44](#) I mean, some of the things that we have in the center for preparedness include the fact that we have a digital display board as soon as you walk into the lobby which runs a program called FYEYE, E-Y-E, which displays New York City Emergency Management information about how to make emergency plans and other public service announcements and information in the lobby. We distributed the information about Emergency Management's Ready New York City and the Notify NYC apps throughout the centers email network. And our computer instructors and volunteers help members download the apps to their cell phones, iPads or computers.

Mayer Waxman: [17:19](#) We offer emergency preparation presentations and booklets. We have print outs of the guide to making an emergency plan in English and in Chinese. We publicize Emergency Management's information and guidance. We host safety and preparedness talks and provide handouts from the NYPD and from FDNY.

Mayer Waxman: [17:39](#) We're close with local politicians, the political leaders in Community Board 7, so they share relevant updates with us and our members. And the members have access to these leaders to ask questions and express concerns. And like most DFTA senior centers, Department for the Aging senior centers, we help keep seniors safe by serving as the New York City cooling center in the summer, and we provide a warm environment, physically as well as emotionally, for seniors on cold winter days. The sensitive staff pay special attention and they check up on their home bound seniors.

Omar Bourne: [18:09](#) And this is why you won this year's Senior Center of the Year Award. Just a number of vast resources that you have available for older adults in New York City. Now you mentioned FDNY. I want to talk a little about the work that you do not only with FDNY, but with NYPD and the American Red Cross as well. Tell us about that.

Mayer Waxman: [18:32](#) I mean one thing that we do besides some of the educational talks that they give is they've got a program that they provide free smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, which they'll put up in member's homes. They do that through the center.

- Omar Bourne: [18:49](#) Yeah.
- Allison Pennisi: [18:50](#) I think that's fantastic. I mean you have such a sense of community and there's such a vast number of resources. It's not even just about how to be prepared, but it's something as simple as having a display board that gives you this information. Having in person presentations. The fact that you bring technology to older adults I think is fantastic. We were talking about misconceptions earlier with our guests, how there are misconceptions on older adults and their their ability to be resilient.
- Omar Bourne: [19:16](#) Right. So talk to us about that sense of community for the older adults that visit your senior centers.
- Mayer Waxman: [19:23](#) Well, many seniors who attend SelfHelp's Benjamin Rosenthal Prince Street Innovative Senior Center, or attend any other senior center, create a strong social support group. Members socialize with peers of different backgrounds, get helpful information such as for emergency preparedness. But they attend classes and social events, they participate in health, mental health wellness programs, they receive social services, and they eat nutritious meals. Seniors are also involved in setting center agendas through surveys and by serving as lay leaders on policy advisory councils. Many seniors center members, they look at the senior center as their second home.
- Omar Bourne: [20:01](#) Wow.
- Allison Pennisi: [20:02](#) Now taking the senior center concept and this model, what would you recommend to people who may want to adopt this type of model for their own municipality? We talk about this a lot, about emergency management at its core is a shared field. Obviously what you're doing is wonderful and it could be applied to other places that might have naturally occurring retirement communities or a larger older adult population.
- Mayer Waxman: [20:28](#) Yeah. I mean, I think a lot of it has to do with empowerment. Meaning you've got people who often have more time on their hands than someone who's either stuck to school or stuck to work. Retirees have time, and they want to spend that time being productive. So there are ways that senior centers provide social services, and they're fulfilling, and there are games, and there are sports, or there's ping pong, and there's Tai Chi. But once you got those people together, then it's very important to take that that positivity and channel it towards something

productive and valuable. So that's why the senior center is a perfect opportunity.

Mayer Waxman: [21:08](#) Or you mentioned NORCs, naturally occurring retirement communities. Wherever you've got a bunch of seniors who are tied together through something, you should make the most out of that and make sure that they're aware of things regarding preparedness and things regarding safety.

Omar Bourne: [21:25](#) So Mayer, what advice would you give to an older adult who's looking to get involved, who doesn't just want to be at home, who's looking for that sense of community?

Mayer Waxman: [21:36](#) Senior centers, at least in New York, are open to anyone who is 60 years of age or older, and they're welcome to come to a center and you can take advantage of all the resources that are there. But we're also open to different ideas. Meaning there are a number of classes and arts activities and physical exercise and nutrition activities that already are there, but we also like to have new voices, and we like to have people suggest something that they want to know about, and we'll add classes into the already active schedules.

Omar Bourne: [22:14](#) Now the Senior Center of the Year Award. You recently held that ceremony, the award ceremony, and I heard that there was singing and there was Tai chi. So you've got to walk me through this award ceremony and just the entertainment that was there and how the seniors felt just being able to participate in this.

Mayer Waxman: [22:41](#) Yeah. I think we had about 200 seniors who participated, and a lot of them participated not just by being in the audience, but by actually performing. We had seven different groups perform from things that are learned at the center.

Omar Bourne: [22:57](#) Right.

Mayer Waxman: [22:58](#) So we had a drum line. We had Chinese violin, it's called. We had a harmonica group. Right? We had a fashion show. We had two dances and Tai chi. And again, a lot of it was from the Chinese culture that the majority of our members come from, and the colors and the sounds. I mean these are again people who come to the center to learn something fun and exciting and to do it with friends in a social environment, and we're glad that we're able to provide them such information as preparedness and safety information when we've got them there. And they want to be there. It's not just like going to learn something

against your will, rather you're there because you enjoy being there.

Allison Pennisi: [23:51](#)

Right.

Omar Bourne: [23:51](#)

So rich resources, you get the emergency preparedness, but you also get to learn new skills.

Allison Pennisi: [23:59](#)

And celebrate life.

Omar Bourne: [24:00](#)

Yeah. Right?

Allison Pennisi: [24:01](#)

And I think that that's a wonderful thing. And we were saying this before, there's that misconception. Older adults are resilient, they're lively, they are ready to learn something new and to apply that to their own lives. And we really appreciate all of the work that you do. So thank you for joining us on "Prep Talk" and discussing this. And congratulations again on winning the award.

Mayer Waxman: [24:23](#)

Thanks so much for having me.

Speaker 4: [24:27](#)

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

Allison Pennisi: [24:31](#)

All right, it's Rapid Response time, and if you are a first time listener, it's simple. Omar and I will ask questions and our guests will give the first answer that comes to mind.

Allison Pennisi: [24:41](#)

All right, first question. Mayer, we'll start with you. What is the one emergency item you cannot live without?

Mayer Waxman: [24:47](#)

Is bundling a legitimate answer? I mean, I feel like I'm supposed to say a hat or warm boots, but I tend to snuggle up in my coat also. So bundling.

Omar Bourne: [24:56](#)

Yeah, we'll take it all. We'll take it all.

Allison Pennisi: [24:57](#)

We'll take it all. Ed, what about you?

Ed Powell: [24:59](#)

I don't know if you'd consider this an item, but one winter emergency thing that I cannot live without is my wife. If you could imagine a cup of soothing hot chocolate in a snow storm, that's my wife.

Omar Bourne: [25:23](#)

All right.

Allison Pennisi: [25:23](#) You get husband of the year. I'm going to have to talk with her after this.

Omar Bourne: [25:28](#) That's probably the... Wow. I was definitely not expecting that.

Allison Pennisi: [25:32](#) Ben, what about you?

Omar Bourne: [25:32](#) Ben, what about you?

Ben Strong: [25:32](#) Well, kind of hard to beat that. I'd go with waterproof boots.

Omar Bourne: [25:40](#) Essentials. They're key.

Ben Strong: [25:42](#) Keep your feet warm.

Allison Pennisi: [25:44](#) Omar goes with three scarves.

Omar Bourne: [25:45](#) That's right. I've got to double up on this scarves at least.

Allison Pennisi: [25:48](#) Triple up.

Omar Bourne: [25:49](#) Yeah. Wow. I'm afraid to ask any more questions here. So the next question. One tip that you would give an older adult about preparedness? Ben, we'll start with you.

Ben Strong: [26:03](#) Get to know your neighbors.

Omar Bourne: [26:05](#) Mm. Wonderful. I like that. We say it all the time. Check on your neighbors. Get to know them. I love it.

Ben Strong: [26:09](#) Yeah.

Omar Bourne: [26:09](#) Mayer, how about you?

Mayer Waxman: [26:11](#) Join a senior center, of course. You'll stay informed about any alerts happening throughout the city and have access to a social worker and a hot meal.

Omar Bourne: [26:19](#) Wonderful. Ed?

Ed Powell: [26:20](#) Don't say I'm going to start preparing tomorrow. Start immediately. Start today. I always say that in my presentations. Start now. You don't know when that emergency is going to happen.

Omar Bourne: [26:34](#) All great answers. What is your favorite sitcom? Mayer?

Mayer Waxman: [26:41](#) Anyone remember "Police Squad" by the makers of "Airplane?" It's a short loop. Because otherwise maybe "Welcome Back, Kotter."

Allison Pennisi: [26:47](#) That's a good throwback. I like that.

Omar Bourne: [26:49](#) Yeah.

Allison Pennisi: [26:49](#) Ed, what about you?

Ed Powell: [26:50](#) I'm going to date myself by saying "I Love Lucy." Fred and Ethel Mertz, you know, they are the best.

Omar Bourne: [26:58](#) Can't go wrong with that.

Allison Pennisi: [26:59](#) Ben?

Omar Bourne: [26:59](#) Ben?

Ben Strong: [27:00](#) "Seinfeld."

Omar Bourne: [27:00](#) Oh, my guy. My guy.

Ben Strong: [27:04](#) [crosstalk 00:27:04] high school.

Omar Bourne: [27:04](#) Shout out to Jerry Seinfeld. I love to say it every time, even though he may not be listening. But "Seinfeld" was there for me as well.

Allison Pennisi: [27:10](#) What's the deal with Omar? All right, guys, some of the work you do in one word. Mayer?

Mayer Waxman: [27:16](#) Dignify. Because we provide dignity for seniors. Maybe we're not actually giving them that dignity, but we allow them to maintain it. Dignify.

Ed Powell: [27:26](#) Rewarding. I think I get probably more out of this than the people who I present to.

Ben Strong: [27:33](#) Equip. We're trying to empower and teach and prepare older adults for the emergencies on the horizon.

Omar Bourne: [27:40](#) And you are all doing a great job at that, and we thank you all for your work.

Allison Pennisi: [27:46](#) Thank you all for being here. We appreciate it.

This transcript was exported on Dec 16, 2019 - view latest version [here](#).

Ed Powell: [27:48](#) Thank you.

Mayer Waxman: [27:48](#) Thanks so much.

Speaker 1: [27:52](#) That's this episode of "Prep Talk." If you like what you heard, you can listen any time online or through your favorite RSS feed. Until next time, stay safe and prepared.