

Bushra: [00:04](#) Hello everyone. 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: [00:23](#) Oh no, say it ain't snow. Welcome, I'm Omar Bourne. Last episode, we spoke about my least favorite season of the year and today we're going to be talking about my least favorite precip. Allison, we're talking about snow. How do you feel about it?

Allison Pennisi: [00:38](#) Hey everybody. It's Allison Pennisi. I have to agree with you Omar. My least favorite precip is snow. I'm waiting for the sun showers to come. Probably around Memorial Day. Actually, I'm ready to crank out our barbecue. What do you think?

Omar Bourne: [00:51](#) I am all for it. I'm all for it.

Allison Pennisi: [00:53](#) Yeah. I need to find out, anybody in the room wants hot dogs, hamburgers? I think we should start grilling, but maybe before we start that, we should grill somebody about snow removal process here in the city. It's a big hot topic for New Yorkers.

Omar Bourne: [01:05](#) I'm with you. Let's do it.

Allison Pennisi: [01:06](#) Joining us on the show is Edward Grayson, Director of the Bureau for Cleaning and Collection at the New York City Department of Sanitation. He's here to discuss snow removal this winter season.

Allison Pennisi: [01:15](#) Ed, thanks so much for joining us.

Edward Grayson: [01:17](#) Pleasure to be here. Thank you so much.

Allison Pennisi: [01:19](#) Okay, so one of the most talked about operations during the winter is snow removal. We've heard that sanitation treats snow response as a year round process, believe it or not. Can you walk our listeners through how the department prepares the city for such a snow event and what the plans and procedures look like?

Edward Grayson: [01:35](#) Absolutely. Snow removal is absolutely a year round process at DSNY. We literally begin planning for a winter season immediately following the end of a winter season. Our night plow organization which is how we refer to winter, begins in

November. It ends in April. For that period, what we'll do is we'll shift additional resources to the nights shifts on both ends so that we have adequate staffing in place to respond for pop up stuff that perhaps somebody might have missed on one of the forecasts. This way we have more people working on three shifts, just in case there's a winter weather and/or and icy condition because while we can watch the forecast, we'll never know whether or not there's a water main or something else that could happen. Any other precipitation event that could impact travel, we want to make sure that we adequate staffing 24/7.

Edward Grayson: [02:25](#) With regard to it being a year round event, as far as planning, 100%. At the end of a season, in April, we'll literally wash all the equipment and retrofit anything that needs to get done because all of our equipment takes a beating during the snow. We'll make sure all the plows are ready to go. We'll also begin doing supply recalculations and ordering for anything that we need, make sure we have enough lead time to get all the stuff we need. Do we need more salt? Do we need more plow supplies? Do we need additional equipment? Do we need more tires? The whole nine yards. It really ramps up as far as preseason planning in September because at that point, hopefully, through the inter agency collaborate with DOT, we know exactly if there are any traffic pattern changes, construction projects, all the stuff that goes into whether or not ... how we're going to deploy the assets to make sure that we have maximum ground coverage with the plows and the spreaders that go out.

Edward Grayson: [03:14](#) That leads right up until the start of November when we shift all the staffing around, make sure that all the people are in place. In between there, sometime in around October, leading up into December, we'll start an extensive training program putting each of the sanitation workers and officers through a series of simulations and drills to make sure that they're ready for the winter season.

Omar Bourne: [03:33](#) Now I know you guys issue snow alerts that indicate the potential for winter weather. When did you guys start putting these messages out to the public?

Edward Grayson: [03:41](#) It was the 2010, 2011 snow season. Prior to that, it was really only an internal message and it's been around for almost ever. Been around for my entire career and even long before that. Basically, it was an internal message that then grew to be shared with our partner agencies in response, like DOT bridges

and NYPD, FD, and MTA. It kept growing with who we would share it with but mostly it started as an internal message to let the workforce know we're in a snow alert so you should start planning for extended tours, daycare, childcare, all the things that happen, and know that that's why we're going to be changing the way we do our staffing dynamic. It started out as an internal message and then in the heightened culture of situational awareness for all New Yorkers that stemmed in that 2010, 2011 season and thereafter, here in New York seasons, we just started telling the public and getting everybody involved.

Allison Pennisi: [04:32](#) The Department of Sanitation also recently changed its snow removal routes, or the names of them I should say, on Plow NYC, which is a way for New Yorkers to track their street designation and also whether a plow has been through their neighborhood. It went from primary, secondary and tertiary to critical, sector, and holster. Do I have that right?

Edward Grayson: [04:51](#) Correct.

Allison Pennisi: [04:52](#) Can you explain what the changes are? Do they affect people's ability to see that their neighborhoods have been cleaned?

Edward Grayson: [05:00](#) No, actually, the change is more reflective of where it's finally where ... we made sure that the public-facing website, where New York City residents can track the progress of the plows with the timestamp of when it was last serviced, accurately reflects the new terminology that coincides with our routing change.

Edward Grayson: [05:17](#) Last year, for the 2016, 2017 season was the first year that we fully implemented the sector methodology on routing. This is a new way to route our pieces and our assets for quicker ground coverage throughout the city. It's tremendously successful. It adds pieces into the residential streets on a quicker turnaround.

Omar Bourne: [05:36](#) Now I know, I want to say it was after the snow storm in 2015, but I could be a little bit off on time, but you guys introduced new equipment to get into smaller streets. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

Edward Grayson: [05:54](#) Absolutely. We actually always had ... so we have two types of small pieces. We call them our internally close quarter combat pieces just because they're for the tighter areas. In theory, we've always had holsters. They are a small soft spreader. They hold about three yards. If you were looking at them from the public, they would look like a pickup truck with a dump body

bed and plow on the front of it. And the other small piece that we added, by in large throughout the fleet, was skid-steers. People sometimes call them bobcats but basically the industry term is skid-steer. Small bucket that kind of looked ... they look like what landscapers would use to clear dirt out of an excavation site. Skid-steers can literally turn on the dime. They can turn around inside their own radius. So they have a very good turning radius.

Omar Bourne: [06:45](#)

Makes sense.

Edward Grayson: [06:45](#)

They have a bucket which is good for digging out. We also have plow attachments, we could use them as plows. Holsters are our frontline for all those dead end streets and tight area streets because literally, if we can't get down there ... the key for us is, the heavy fleet needs to be able to drive through because what you don't want is backing up in and out all night. It's very time consuming to be able to back up, especially with a plow on. So any time we have dead end streets, or tight streets where the width of the street way is going to be tight, we're using those holsters. They are our frontline for that.

Edward Grayson: [07:22](#)

After the Jonas blizzard ...

Omar Bourne: [07:25](#)

Jonas.

Edward Grayson: [07:25](#)

Yeah, after the Jonas storm in the [20]15, [20]16 season, we found that especially in a tighter residential areas, what we needed was to be able to get to those streets faster with that smaller equipment so we exponentially increased the size of the fleet in that area. It was basically a right sizing of what we needed to do the job.

Allison Pennisi: [07:44](#)

You're talking about tight streets and all I keep thinking about it New Yorkers who leave their cars on the streets because they have no choice. My question is about alternate side parking. What goes into that decision? What agencies are responsible for helping make that decision? When does that decision get made?

Edward Grayson: [08:00](#)

That's, again, forecast driven. I know it's an annoying thing when your car is terrible. Believe me, I grew up in Queens. I had to move the car twice a week. My father dreaded it every day. I get it. Believe me. We understand the impact, specifically in areas where parking's at a premium. It's a game of nuances and whatnot but technically we don't have the authority to suspend ASP. We ask DOT because they have the authority. They enforce

all the parking, the postage street signage. So what we do is in collaboration, our two commissioners have a conversation that's directly driven off of the forecast and where DSNY thinks we'll be operationally and then we ask for them ... we tell them that we don't think we're going to be able to ... we don't think it's a good idea to have the cars moved because of the forecast, the weather.

Edward Grayson: [08:44](#) Also, let's not forget that we plow to the right in heavy snow. If we plowed a lot of snow into the people parked on the right hand side and it's going to be one of those events where, again, we're expecting the snowfall to last. We don't want people out there in an unsafe thing. So they would have to dig themselves out to be able to move the car to get the plows in there. So it's forecast driven. Believe it or not, the decision to suspend is usually done to benefit the public because we understand that it's not a good time to have everybody out there driving around and moving their car.

Edward Grayson: [09:16](#) Equally as challenging is the ... and whether or not we'll have favorable temps. For us to have alternate side after having snowfall, put back into play, that means we're going to come by and we're going to start kicking from the ... we usually plow right and in clearing operations, when we put it back in effect after heavy snowfall, we plow to the left to descent the long roadway. We need temps and sun for that because what we're doing is we're scattering the snow out into what we're displacing now the hard packed snow over a greater area so that science can take over and it has a better chance to melt and give you a clearer roadway. If none of those variables are there, we would not ask people to move. So that's really what goes into it, but it's a collaboration between both commissioners to make an informed decision.

Omar Bourne: [10:00](#) The plowing to the right, can I just say that if my car is parked on the right hand side, and I know it's going to snow, I learned that the hard way one year where my car was packed in on the right hand side and I had to dig and dig and dig, and then I said, you know what? I realize these guys only plow to the right. So I'm going to park my car on the left hand side every time there's snow.

Allison Pennisi: [10:23](#) The more you know.

Omar Bourne: [10:24](#) There you go.

Allison Pennisi: [10:25](#) Stick around. We have more to come on today's show, but first, here's Bushra with our "Prep Talk" tip.

Bushra: [10:31](#) Thanks Allison. Prolonged exposure to cold can lead to hypothermia, frostbite, and can worsen existing medical conditions such as heart and lung diseases. Hypothermia occurs when the body temperature drops to a dangerously low level. It can lead to death. Frostbite occurs when parts of the body freeze, such as the fingers, toes, ears, nose, and cheeks. It can cause permanent damage. For more information on hypothermia and frostbite, visit NYC.gov/health.

Omar Bourne: [11:01](#) Thank you, Bushra. Now when it comes to snow removal, New Yorkers are extremely vocal and they depend on you guys obviously for that to happen, but what can New Yorkers do as individuals to help the Sanitation Department during the snow removal process?

Edward Grayson: [11:18](#) First thing New Yorkers can do is abide by the messaging that's being put out. Not just by DSNY but by emergency management, the Mayor's office, news media. There's some really common sense, good messaging that's been going out there and that would be really helpful if they abided by that such as use mass transit, stay off the roads when told, dress appropriately, stay warm, watch for the frostbite, all of that. That helps because you'd be surprised how many people put themselves in jeopardy during a snow response because they just haven't abided by some common sense ... Now, New York's a town full of hustle and bustle and a lot of people have a lot of ... they're juggling a lot of responsibilities. We know that. But if you just took a few seconds to abide by some of the messaging.

Edward Grayson: [12:01](#) As far as what they can do specifically for DSNY or for the community in relationship to DSNY, again, common sense. Number two, don't park all the way to the corner, because it's a funny thing. Parking becomes a tight scramble but if you're the kind of block where there's normally a little bit of leeway from the corner, but now it's tight for parking so you're going to get right up on there, well, what's going to happen is you're going to cut down my turn radius. So I'm going to get into the block because we're trained drivers but you're going to give me a challenge that I don't need with a plow on it. So if you cannot park all the way to the corner, that would be helpful. Helps us go that much quicker.

Edward Grayson: [12:43](#) When you're shoveling your snow, if you wouldn't shovel it onto the catch basin. That would be helpful.

Allison Pennisi: [12:49](#) Absolutely.

Omar Bourne: [12:50](#) Very important.

Edward Grayson: [12:50](#) Matter of fact, if you're a corner property or if you have a catch basin, you might want to dig that out for yourself because not only are you going to have better drainage on the block, you're going to help your fellow neighbors also have drainage. You don't want to shovel your snow in front of a hydrant because you may have a fire and you certainly don't want to stop the fire department from being able to access the hydrant. So you got some common sense approaches there.

Edward Grayson: [13:14](#) When you're shoveling your sidewalk or your property, don't think of yourself as the abled-body person who's out there shoveling. Think of yourself as the mobility-challenged New York citizen. Think of the elderly who use a cane. You want a wider path so while you may be able-bodied and fit, you're thinking that the 20 inches of my shovel is good enough, it's really not. Think three to four feet in width if you're going to bother to shovel a path because you're going to capture a lot of folks that would really appreciate if you gave them that much clearance while they're walking. This city never sleeps. All we're doing is telling you to stay off the road but most people still have places to go so they're walking and they're taking [inaudible 00:13:57]. So you have that.

Edward Grayson: [13:58](#) And the other thing to that end, be a good neighbor. Now I'm nobody's Jiminy Cricket, but be a good neighbor. If you know you have elderly on your block, if you know you have vulnerable citizens. If you know that you have citizens that have physical impairments or challenges, think of those neighbors and maybe you can help them shovel too.

Omar Bourne: [14:19](#) Very, very informative information. Hopefully this sheds some light on snow removal process going forward. Is there anything else you'd want the public to know about DSNY's role in snow removal operations?

Edward Grayson: [14:32](#) Yes. The same men and women that you see out there every day picking up your refuse and recyclables-

Omar Bourne: [14:40](#) I know where you're going.

Edward Grayson: [14:41](#) ... in the street, they're the same men and women who are in the plow trucks. There's not a unique dynamic workforce. We shift operations from one to the other. These are dedicated,

hardworking men and women who go out every day to try to make New York City's life better. Our core missions are service, safety, and sustainability, and snow removal is absolutely ... well, it's the fourth S, it is absolutely at the forefront.

- Edward Grayson: [15:04](#) The other thing that you got to remember, that there's eight and a half million or better New Yorkers depending on whose census track you read or watch that. There's a little over 10,000 people that work for the New York City Department of Sanitation. From uniform frontline staff to auto mechanics and support staff to the people in technology to the budget folks to the administrators to the planners to the business analysts all the way to the clerical staff. And all of them are in a snow alert together to try to make everybody's life better when it snows. Working in collaboration with our partners here in New York City management, Emergency Management and all across the city, we're doing our best. We need some patience because we are all victims of the same meteorological event at the same time.
- Omar Bourne: [15:52](#) That's true.
- Allison Pennisi: [15:52](#) Right.
- Edward Grayson: [15:52](#) Most of our workforce goes home after a 14-hour shift and shovels snow again for themselves because they too are also part of the response. And in snow, and in severe weather, we are the first of the first responders and we take that very seriously.
- Omar Bourne: [16:11](#) Well said. Well said.
- Allison Pennisi: [16:11](#) Yup. New York's strongest. I love it. Ed, thank you so much for being here today. We really appreciate you shedding light on the snow removal operations and we're hoping for a very quiet winter weather season but I won't hold my breath.
- Edward Grayson: [16:25](#) Definitely.
- Omar Bourne: [16:25](#) I hope so. But thank you for being here Ed, we appreciate it.
- Edward Grayson: [16:28](#) Been an absolute pleasure. I thank you both.
- Allison Pennisi: [16:29](#) All right. That's this edition of "Prep Talk." If you like what you heard, you can listen anytime online or subscribe to your favorite RSS feed. Until next time, stay safe and prepared.

