

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, Omar Bourne and Allison Pennisi.

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

Hello, everyone. Thank you for listening. I am Omar Bourne.

Allison Pennisi ([00:30](#)):

And 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, LinkedIn and much more.

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

Allison, we are continuing our theme of winter preparedness. In this episode, we will be discussing fire safety. As you know, December 21st marks the official start of the winter season, which means there's something that I dread, that I totally dread. Allison, you know what it is? It's cold weather. Can't stand it, don't like it.

Allison Pennisi ([01:16](#)):

Oh, I understand, Omar. But how can you stay warm and safe during the winter? We have a special guest to talk to us about winter fire safety, Captain Michael Kozo of the New York City Fire Department, or FDNY. So FDNY not only provides fire protection and other critical public safety services to residents and visitors throughout the five boroughs, the agency also works to continually educate the public in fire, life safety and disaster preparedness along with enforcing public safety codes. Captain Kozo, welcome back to 'Prep Talk.'

Michael Kozo ([01:47](#)):

Thank you very much. Thanks for having me.

Omar Bourne ([01:49](#)):

Now, Captain, FDNY has a wide range of programs to help New Yorkers become FDNY smart, from fire safety education materials and presentations to a state-of-the-art learning center. So can you walk our listeners through these initiatives and how have these presentations changed during the pandemic?

Michael Kozo ([02:13](#)):

So yeah, like you mentioned, we do have several ways to get our messages out there. One of which is the fire safety education unit in which we do presentations to people of all ages. And typically, we would be doing these presentations in person. We would go to whatever site the presentation's being held at and we would give our presentations. However, with the pandemic upon us, we have transitioned to virtual presentations. So we are now doing presentations online and you can request those presentations through [fdnysmart.org](#), and you can have the presentation scheduled with us.

Michael Kozo ([02:55](#)):

Also, there is the learning center, the brand new Fire Zone, which is in Manhattan in Rockefeller Center. We did a nice video that you can see on that website that goes through all of the new and improved items that we have at the Fire Zone. Also, there's several good things at the new Fire Zone, and it's a great trip to take to see what we have going on there. And the Fire Zone is open now during the pandemic as well.

Omar Bourne ([03:21](#)):

And do people have to make an appointment to visit the Fire Zone? And obviously with the pandemic, we do remind you that there are social distancing guidelines in place, and you will have to wear your face coverings. Is that correct?

Michael Kozo ([03:36](#)):

That is correct. You could go on the website, fdnysmart.org, where you would request a presentation from the fire safety education unit. And you can book a trip to the Fire Zone and you will be given a time to come in. And there is all social distancing regulations being adhered to at the Fire Zone. You would have to wear a mask at all times. We're only allowing a certain amount of people in there at one time. And some of the hands-on, I would say all of the hands-on, things that we have there right now are cordoned off so that there is no cross contamination of anything. But you are still able to experience a lot of things, as well as sit inside the theater and experience the different scenarios.

Allison Pennisi ([04:17](#)):

It's a great resource for the public, so thank you for sharing that. So when we think about fire safety, Captain, we often think about smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms. According to the FDNY, an operable smoke alarm can cut your chances of dying in a fire nearly in half. So can you talk to our listeners about the importance of smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms, and where should they be located in a person's home?

Michael Kozo ([04:41](#)):

So like you said, that statistic is phenomenal and that speaks volumes in itself that having a working smoke and carbon monoxide alarm reduces your chances of dying in a fire by 50%. So I can't overemphasize enough the importance of having these smoke and carbon monoxide alarms in your home. You should have one combination smoke and carbon monoxide alarm on every level of your home, as well as a smoke only alarm in every bedroom. That is what the NFPA recommends and that's what we go by. You should be testing these alarms once a month by pressing the test button. If you still have an old smoke alarm where you have to replace the batteries, you should be replacing those batteries every six months during change your clock. We say, change your clock, you change your battery.

Michael Kozo ([05:34](#)):

However, now it's a new law that any smoke alarm that is being sold today is going to be a 10 year sealed unit, meaning that it has a lithium-ion battery inside the compartment that you cannot access. There's no way to open this compartment anymore. You don't have to change the batteries anymore, The battery is good for up to 10 years. And after the 10 years, you'll start to hear the alarm chirp, as it normally would, telling you that the battery is dying. And at that point, you would go out and buy a new

10-year sealed alarm and replace it with the old. So that is what we recommend and we cannot emphasize enough the importance of having these alarms and making sure that they are working properly. The alarm should be installed on the ceilings. If at all possible. That's really where we want them to be installed.

Omar Bourne ([06:21](#)):

Critical information here for everyone listening. In addition to smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms, let's talk about some other do's and don'ts of fire safety. What do you have for us, Captain?

Michael Kozo ([06:35](#)):

So if we're going to talk about... Let's just talk, because we're in the winter season, do's and don'ts. We can talk about heating in your house because that is a big, hot topic so to speak. One of the things we do not want people to do is to heat their homes with their oven. A lot of people will turn their ovens on to heat their home, that is not a good practice and we definitely don't want anybody doing that. What you do want to make sure that you do if you get a space heater that you know how to use it properly, and that you're getting the right type of space heater. You should be looking for a space heater that has been tested and approved by a reputable company, such as Underwriters Laboratories. And you want to make sure that when you're looking for a space heater that you are buying one that has an automatic shutoff feature to it.

Michael Kozo ([07:30](#)):

What will happen with the automatic shut-off feature is if you, by accident, tip over your space heater, the space heater will shut itself off, and you will have to upright the space heater and turn it on again in order for it to turn on. This is something that is very important, because if you don't have that feature and you knock your space heater over, the space heater will continue to run on its side and that is a very dangerous situation. Also, you want to make sure that you keep three feet around that space heater clear of anything combustible at all times. And one thing that I tell people and that is highly recommended is that you run the space heater in the room that you're trying to heat while you're still awake.

Michael Kozo ([08:14](#)):

Once you go to sleep, you should be shutting off and unplugging that space heater. It should not be running all night long while you are sleeping. And a lot of people don't like me for that, but unfortunately that is the safe way of using a space heater. There is also a lot of cooking going on during the season, during the holiday season and things like that. We want to make sure that we are practicing a three foot zone around our kitchen that is going to be free of any children. Children should not be in the kitchen while you're cooking. A few things you want to make sure that you have on hand while you are cooking is an oven mitt. You want to make sure that have baking soda and a pot or a lid to the pan that you're cooking in.

Michael Kozo ([09:00](#)):

These items are here in case there is a grease fire or some type of fire while you are cooking. You're able to either throw the baking soda on top of the fire to smother it and/or you can cover it with that lid. You want to remove the heat source by shutting off the flame to the stove, to the oven, and you want to make sure that you are able to move that pan off of the hot burner so that the oils inside don't keep heating up from the burner being hot. One thing you do not want to do on a grease fire is use water.

Water will only make the fire worse and we want to make sure that we avoid using water at all costs. Those are some of the things that we do recommend as far as kitchen safety goes.

Michael Kozo ([09:50](#)):

In regards to Christmas trees, we do have a few items that we recommend in regards to Christmas trees. I know back in the day, definitely beyond my time, but people used to use actual candles, plain candles on their Christmas trees. That is obviously something that we do not recommend. We recommend that you use lights and/or flameless candles anywhere in your home. And you want to make sure that you're testing these lights before you put them out, whether you're putting them out outside or on your Christmas tree or around your house, we want to make sure that you're checking them for any frayed wires or anything like that. And if you see anything like that, that you don't use that light, that you replace those light bulbs as soon as possible.

Michael Kozo ([10:37](#)):

Also, you want to make sure that you're watering your Christmas tree daily, and I say daily. A Christmas tree, a healthy Christmas tree will drink up to a gallon of water per day. So you need to make sure that you're keeping that Christmas tree well-hydrated on a daily basis. There is several videos out of the difference between a dried out Christmas tree and what happens if there's a spark or a flame, and how quickly that Christmas tree will ignite and burn versus a Christmas tree that is well-hydrated, and the difference between the time it takes for a Christmas tree that is well-hydrated to burn. And you're talking several minutes in difference between the time it will take. So it's definitely important that you keep that Christmas tree well-hydrated. And once you're done after the season is over, that you discard of that Christmas tree as soon as possible, that you don't leave it sitting around your home as it's drying out. Those are just a few of the safety tips that we do recommend during this holiday and winter season.

Allison Pennisi ([11:37](#)):

And all really great safety points, especially when it comes to cooking this holiday season. One thing I love that FDNY says is, "Stand by your pan and don't leave anything unattended." If you're using candles for celebrations or decorative purposes, to make sure you're using flameless candles and then practicing safety with that. So those are all very important reminders. So Captain, thank you for those. So New York City Emergency Management and the FDNY have collaborated on a number of initiatives to prepare New Yorkers for emergencies. Something both agencies emphasize is being prepared by having an emergency plan. Not only having a plan, but also practicing this plan with members of your household and your support network. So what are key points you want New Yorkers to know about how to prevent fires and stay safe if there is a fire?

Michael Kozo ([12:27](#)):

To stay safe if there is a fire, you want to make sure that you have and you practice a fire escape plan with everybody in your home, and this should be done immediately. The time to try and figure out how you're going to get out of your home in a fire is not while it's on fire. Once it's on fire, it's too late. So you want to sit down immediately and you want to draw out a little escape plan with everybody in your home that's going to point out where the exits are, how you're going to get out of your house if there's a fire. You want to try and make sure that you have at least two ways out of your home. This way, if one way is blocked by fire, you can always go another way. You want to make sure that during this fire escape plan that you go over, that everybody is going to let everybody else know that there is a fire and that you all get out together if possible.

Michael Kozo ([13:17](#)):

One person may wake up from the smoke alarm going off when someone else may not. So you want to make sure that everybody knows that everybody is awake and aware that there is an emergency in your home and something is going on, and you all get out together. That is very important. Also, during this fire escape plan, how we're going to get out. So you want to make sure that we're all crawling, that we're staying low to the ground, that we're keeping our hand on the wall. And our hand on the wall acts as a guide. In a fire, it is extremely difficult to see anything. By keeping your hand on the wall, you're going to be able to guide yourself to the exit. If you take your hand off the wall, there's a good chance that you may be crawling around in circles in the same room and not know it. So you want to keep your hand on the wall at all times.

Michael Kozo ([14:03](#)):

And as you're all getting out together, try and keep in contact with each other, try and hold onto a leg or something so that everybody is going along together. Once you get to an exit, you want to obviously make sure that you're feeling the door for heat to make sure that there is not fire on the other side of that door. By doing that, you're going to feel the door with the back of your hand. If the door is warm to the touch, it is okay, right? You're in a fire, the door is probably going to be warm. If you have to pull your hand away from the door because it's that hot, then that's a bad sign that there may be fire on the other side. If you do feel that it's okay to open the door, make sure that you keep control of the door by holding onto the door knob, open the door slowly, look outside to make sure that there's no fire or smoke or flames outside the door.

Michael Kozo ([14:50](#)):

Once you see that it's cleared, you can then open the door fully and proceed out that door. However, if there is smoke or fire or flame on the other side of that door, you're able to close that door immediately because you kept control of the door by holding onto the door knob. If you allow the door to swing open and then find out that there's smoke or fire on the other side, it's going to be very difficult to get that door and grab it quick enough to close it. So you want to make sure that you keep control of the door at all times. Along with this fire escape plan, you want to make sure that you have a designated meeting place outside of your home. This meeting place is extremely important because this is what's going to let you know that everybody is out of your home safely. It may happen that some people go out one exit and other people in your home go out another exit, and people will stay where they are.

Michael Kozo ([15:39](#)):

So if somebody goes out the front door and somebody goes out the back door, they may stay in the front and back doors respectively not knowing that the other person is outside of the house safely. So we want to make sure that we have a designated meeting place outside so that no matter which way anybody gets out, you all meet at the same place outside your home so that everybody knows that everybody is out safely. Like I said before, these are things that you want to make sure that you go over now, not when there's a fire because it's too late.

Omar Bourne ([16:08](#)):

And I like the fact that you talk about going over it, because practice is key when you have a plan because you don't want to do it haphazardly, and you definitely don't want to wing it. Interestingly enough, we have fire drills at schools, at work. How important is it to have that family fire drill at home?

In other words, you talked about crawling and touching the walls. How important is it to actually practice that so that you are familiar with doing it in the event that there is, God forbid, a fire?

Michael Kozo ([16:46](#)):

So it's very funny that you bring that up, Omar, because when we do presentations, I typically like to ask children as well as adults how often they do a fire drill at home. And I always refer to the example that in schools, they do fire drills all the time and they know exactly how to get out and where to go if there's a fire in their school. And I always ask if they know those things in their own home. And unfortunately, a lot of people do not practice fire drills as often as they should in their home. So along with this fire escape plan, so you're going to make the fire escape plan, but you want to practice it. You don't want to just write it down on paper or sit down at a table and go over it and then never put it into action. So you want to put it into action, not when there's a fire, you want to put it into action when everything is calm and under control so that you know exactly what to do without hesitation if there is an emergency.

Michael Kozo ([17:39](#)):

And don't get me wrong, you don't have to go to the extreme where it's two o'clock in the morning and you start setting your smoke alarm off and having these smoke machines going off in your home, and trying to make it like there's a fire. Under regular normal circumstances, just have everybody... You could set the smoke alarm more so everybody's used to the sound of the smoke alarm and that they react quickly and that you all just practice the escape plan under normal circumstances. And I think that's very important. And you should be doing that no less than two to three times a year.

Omar Bourne ([18:15](#)):

Great advice. Allison, that reminds me of the "Seinfeld" episode with George when there was a fire, and he totally cleared out the entire room and got out first.

Allison Pennisi ([18:27](#)):

Yes. It's funny, as Captain Kozo was talking, the first thing I thought of was George running over these kids to get out of the building. And it's like every person for himself, "Everyone get out." And he runs ahead of everybody. It's a good advice to not do that. I also want to give a shout out to the FDNY "Close the Door" public service announcement or PSA, which is a really simple message to make sure that you close the door as part of your fire safety practice and for fire escape, really clear and simple message for New Yorkers.

Michael Kozo ([18:59](#)):

The messaging comes from the fact that what we want to make sure is that you close the door when you exit your home in a fire, especially in a multiple dwelling or a building, that you're closing the door behind you to isolate that fire and contain it within your apartment so that the fire doesn't come outside into the hallway and contaminate the rest of the building. So that is also a very important message. Make sure that you close the door behind you. Even if you're in your own home, by closing the door, let's just say the fire's in your bedroom, and you close the door to your bedroom and then you close the door to your house, you're isolating the fire even further which is an advantage to us as the fire department, because we'll be able to get into that house and closer to the fire in a very clear environment, or a clearer environment, as opposed to having that door open where it's going to contaminate the entire house.

Allison Pennisi ([19:50](#)):

So we know people should call 911 in an emergency and evacuate immediately if they smell gas, if they see smoke or fire, or even if they have a carbon monoxide alarm that goes off that they should leave and call 911. But one question that often comes up in presentations on emergency preparedness, and I know that FDNY answers this question all the time, is whether a building is fireproof. So can you explain to our listeners what does that mean? And how can someone find out if their building is in fact fireproof?

Michael Kozo ([20:19](#)):

So a building is required to have it posted in their lobby the type of building it is. It may say fireproof or non-fireproof, and then sometimes you'll see it saying combustible or non-combustible. So you want to look for that sign inside your building lobby. And a lot of people misinterpret the term fireproof, right? Thinking that, "Okay, my building's fireproof. I can't have a fire in this building." That's unfortunately not the case. What that means is that the building is made to contain the fire within the apartment, provided a few things, right? Provided again that we close that door behind us so that we make sure that the door closes. And in these buildings, in these fireproof buildings, that's why you have self-closing apartment doors. The doors will automatically close behind you. And it's important that you make sure that that feature is working on those doors to keep the fire within that apartment.

Michael Kozo ([21:14](#)):

So there's a few things that can help you to identify a fireproof or non-fireproof building, but there's nothing set in stone. So a building over 75 feet in height is typically a fireproof building. You're not going to see fire escapes on that building, whereas a building lower than 75 feet in height is going to have the fire escapes, and that is a pretty good indicator that that building is non-fireproof if it does have the fire escapes. If you live in a fireproof building and the fire is not in your apartment, it is usually safer to stay inside your apartment, keep the door closed and stay inside your apartment. If the fire is on your floor, maybe you'll see some smoke permeating through the hallway. And if you see some smoke coming into your door, you just want to take a damp towel and shove it underneath the door to prevent anything from coming in.

Michael Kozo ([22:09](#)):

However, if you live in a fireproof building and the fire is in your apartment, obviously you want to get out, close the door behind you and call 911. The difference comes in a non-fireproof building. So in a non-fireproof building, regardless of whether the fire is in your apartment or in someone else's apartment, you have to get out of that building because the fire can spread and will spread from one apartment to the next. There's really nothing to stop it. The building is not constructed the way a fireproof building is to prevent that fire from spreading. So that is very important to know that in a non-fireproof building, you must get out regardless of where the fire is. And if the fire is in your apartment, that you close that door behind you.

Omar Bourne ([22:54](#)):

Practical information from Captain Kozo of the FDNY. Captain, I want to go back to talking about the holiday season. And I want to ask a question about outlets, because I know people have Christmas trees, they may have lights in the home. You may have a space heater. Where are we going to plug all of these resources and remind us why is it important to ensure that we are plugging these in safely?

Michael Kozo ([23:25](#)):

So you want to make sure that any item, and the space heater's included, any item that heats or cools is plugged directly into the wall outlet. You are not using an extension cord or a power strip for these items. These items require a lot of power, a lot of wattage, and you need to plug them into their own dedicated outlet. You should not have any other items plugged into these outlets. So you want to make sure, again, that you're plugging it directly into the wall outlet and that you're not plugging any other items into that outlet. Also, a lot of these plugs require a three-prong outlet, which a lot of people unfortunately do not have or do not have a lot of in their homes. So you want to make sure that you go out and you buy an adapter that will allow you to adapt a two-prong to a three-pronged plug.

Allison Pennisi ([24:17](#)):

Very helpful tips. Speaking with Captain Kozo of the FDNY. Rapid Response is up next, but first, here's a message from the New York City Fire Department.

Speaker 5 ([24:30](#)):

There's a fire in your home. You have to get out. And you can prevent that fire from spreading and harming others. Close the door. For more fire safety information, visit fdnysmart.org. Remember, closing the door saves lives.

Speaker 6 ([24:59](#)):

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

Allison Pennisi ([25:07](#)):

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, Captain Kozo, first question. What is the one emergency item you cannot live without?

Michael Kozo ([25:22](#)):

I would say a smoke alarm.

Omar Bourne ([25:24](#)):

Great answer. Second question, what is one important fire safety tip people should remember?

Michael Kozo ([25:31](#)):

Important fire safety tip. One tip I would say again to make sure that you're testing and maintaining your smoke alarms and that you're testing them monthly.

Omar Bourne ([25:40](#)):

Switching gears to something a little lighter. What is your favorite holiday theme song? And are you going to sing it for us? Can you sing it for us?

Michael Kozo ([25:49](#)):

I am a man of many talents. However, singing is not one of those talents. So my favorite holiday theme song I would say would have to be "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer."

This transcript was exported on Dec 23, 2020 - view latest version [here](#).

Omar Bourne ([26:02](#)):

Oh, that's a classic. That's a good one. Allison, you want to sing it for us?

Allison Pennisi ([26:06](#)):

I respectfully decline the request. Maybe some other time. Last but not least, Captain, sum up the work you do in one word.

Michael Kozo ([26:18](#)):

I would say prepare, practice and plan.

Allison Pennisi ([26:25](#)):

That's a good one. I don't think we've had any alliteration before like that as a response. I like it.

Omar Bourne ([26:32](#)):

Yeah. And it goes with the mission of emergency management and public safety in general, so well said.

Michael Kozo ([26:40](#)):

Thank you.

Allison Pennisi ([26:41](#)):

So for our listeners, if you to learn more about how to be FDNY smart this holiday season and beyond, visit fdnysmart.org for tips and to request a virtual presentation. We wish you all a very safe and joyous holiday season.

Speaker 1 ([27:01](#)):

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