

Prep Talk - Episode 75 - A Career In Public Service - Commissioner Andrew D'Amora

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 ([00:23](#)):

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

Allison Pennisi ([00:26](#)):

And I'm Allison Pennisi, and you are 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 at nycemergencymgt, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and much more.

Christina Farrell ([00:46](#)):

In this very special episode, we will interview Andrew D'Amora, known as Andy, our outgoing Acting Commissioner, who's retiring from city service. Commissioner D'Amora has been working at NYC emergency management since 2014, and has been a dedicated public servant for more than 30 years, including most of that time with the NYPD. Thank you for joining us, Andy.

Andy D'Amora ([01:09](#)):

Thank you, Christina and Allison. I'm so thrilled to be here.

Allison Pennisi ([01:14](#)):

Commissioner, tell us about your path to emergency management.

Andy D'Amora ([01:16](#)):

It's amazing how all these decades have passed so quickly, but just starting as a cop, back in 1990, working in Flatbush, Brooklyn. And then just coming up through the ranks, just on the emergency management side. I wound up being the Commanding Officer of the Operations Division in the NYPD. So, basically you're the emergency manager for the police department. During that time, of course, responded to 9/11, just working with planned and unplanned events. You look at the magnitude of like planning for New Year's Eve in Time Square, and never really having had that experience before you always worked those details. But the behind the scenes of planning and then responding to these type of events has really laid the foundation for me to come over here, which has been fantastic.

Christina Farrell ([02:04](#)):

So you joined our agency, as we said, as Chief of Staff in 2014. And you also served as First Deputy Commissioner, before taking the helm as Commissioner. I would say it's safe to say you have had a breadth of experience as a first responder before you joined our team, but how did the reality of your role match up with your expectations?

Andy D'Amora (02:23):

It's funny, before I came here, and just working at PD Ops for many years, you realize that no one agency, no one person, can do it alone. And you take it for granted that you could do things without the input of others. But when I came here, I just couldn't believe the depth and the magnitude of help, the hard working people that work at emergency management. So smart, brilliant, from the planning side to response, and to recovery, that emergency management cycle. This place covers the whole gamut with the talented people that work here.

Andy D'Amora ([02:58](#)):

And it had definitely exceeded my expectations. I'd never thought that to be put in here as the Chief of Staff, originally for Commissioner Esposito and then Deanne Criswell, made me the First Deputy Commissioner. And it's just amazing that I wound up being the Commissioner working with John Scrivani, who was awesome. And just to round it out has just been an amazing, and a thrill to cap a career going into my 32nd year working for the city. So it's just been an amazing journey. And I just, I love this agency. I love the people here. And the talent pool is just a tremendous.

Allison Pennisi ([03:32](#)):

So, as you said, you've responded to an array of emergencies as a police officer for the September 11th terrorist attacks, even being a leader here at emergency management for the COVID-19 pandemic. So, how have emergencies affected you both professionally and personally?

Andy D'Amora ([03:48](#)):

If you go back to the first World Trade Center bomb in '93, I was a police officer. So, my father-in-law worked in the Trade Center at that time. And then 9/11 of course, just the many days down there and the magnitude of that. And then working in PD Operations, coordinating efforts of the department for hurricanes Irene and Sandy was really a tremendous experience. I think how it affected me personally, you see people in need and just gives you a more desire to help. And just being in this role, being the Chief of Staff through Commissioner now, you look at hurricane Maria, how we all went down to Puerto Rico and really helped out the people, San Juan, and the whole island actually.

Andy D'Amora ([04:34](#)):

And we just have a tremendous group of people here that went in different teams. I was just so, number one, encouraged how we can make a difference in people's lives, even not, the sixth borough being Puerto Rico. And even here, we go to just the basic, we go to a two along fire responses out there, working with the team, Human Services. People are in need, they need to have housing. And just to see that side of it, where you don't typically see it as a first responder, whether or in PD and fire. Okay, the fire is out, fire department was on. PD, they do traffic control, whatever the scene may be. But behind the scenes, what emergency management personnel do, it's just amazing how they help the people in the city of New York, just try to recover from... Try to get that red cross, whatever it may be, Human Services and working with the other agencies, to make sure people have a place to go.

Christina Farrell ([05:25](#)):

So, you talked a little bit about deploying for hurricane Maria, what you remember, your time down there in San Juan. But what are some of your other memorable moments here at emergency management? Both in the field and in the office, and maybe remote too, since we're still in the age of COVID.

Andy D'Amora ([05:43](#)):

You mean besides birthday babies? No, I'm joking.

Christina Farrell ([05:44](#)):

Can't beat birthday babies.

Andy D'Amora ([05:47](#)):

No, without a doubt. Listen, just starting from the beginning, when I first got here you look at, and it's funny how we ended with a pandemic with COVID, but looking at Legionnaires and Ebola, public health crisis, from the get-go. It's amazing. No one really knew how many cooling towers there are in the city. So boots in the ground, everybody. Myself, from the second floor, everybody pitched in, try to get these locations, get working on vendors. I'll never forget in EOC having working with logistics and getting those vendors out there to clean these cooling towers and having a protocol, there was none in place, for DOB and DOH to get out. And now they have a system in place where they check regularly.

Andy D'Amora ([06:31](#)):

So that, of course the never ending power outage scenarios that hit us in the summer, and in the winter sometimes as well. I remember the first week that Commissioner Criswell was here, two weeks actually, and first we had the 4th of July and then we had the upper Manhattan Midtown, actually a whole grid went out. So, that was a challenge, right from the get-go.

Andy D'Amora ([06:58](#)):

And also we had some other issues that year with some heat, and just keeping on top of it. And I think the biggest lesson, for me anyway, going back to even when I was a young captain, was establishing relationships in blue skies when things were okay, and this way you could pick up the phone and get that information and just to push things. I think that's like a real critical part of our job as emergency managers, is to establish those relationships. So when things happened, you could pick up the phone and really get things done. And I think, talk about power outages, our relationship with Coned has grown over these last seven and a half years. And just really, there's over always going to be issues, things happen. It's machinery, things break down, storms come, you can't control it. But what you can control is how you respond to it. And those relationships are a big part of it.

Allison Pennisi ([07:51](#)):

You're talking about relationships and fostering that collaboration and working together, both within the agency and also our partners outside of the agency, city, state, federal, non profits, utility partners. And one of the things that you always say is that this agency is a family, and we treat all of our partners like family too, because that's the way we get our job done. So, this kind of goes back to that. I know you also are a family man. Who has been your inspiration?

Andy D'Amora ([08:20](#)):

Oh, wow. Let's see. Work wise, I guess my older brother, he was a cop before me. He really laid the found... Like how to do things right. And, of course my parents, can't forget about them, who really sacrificed for me and my brothers and sisters. So, my wife, my kids, they're my inspiration every day. It keeps me a little motivated because you want to... I always looked at it like this, people think... It's not an overreaction, I see a storm coming, or if I see power outages, because I think, hey, that could be me

without power. Let's try to get it done as soon as we can. Because if your mother, or you had a relative in that position, you would want to be on top of it. So, that's one of the things that drives me, is making sure that, hey, someone's out without power, someone lost their home for one reason or another, let's try to do the right thing and make it work.

Christina Farrell (09:15):

So Andy, as you retire, there's a new mayoral administration coming in. There will be a new commissioner here at emergency management. As you finish strong, what advice do you have for your successor?

Andy D'Amora (09:27):

Listen to the talent that's here. You can't know everything, but you'll know who to go to. So each bureau and division here is led by senior leadership who are experienced and talented beyond belief. And they really genuinely care about this agency and the city.

Allison Pennisi (09:45):

I think we can get behind that advice.

Christina Farrell (09:48):

Yes. So another question what, besides me of course, Christina, Allison and to Sean, our trusty sound mixer, will you miss most about working at New York City Emergency Management, the police department and for the city?

Andy D'Amora (10:04):

You know, Allison alluded to it before, the family aspect. I've always tried to do that in anywhere I've worked, I've been the commanding officer, always tried to make it light. When you can, you need to just stay established. Like I talked about the liaison, the interagencies, establish those relationships and blue skies. So when there's blue skies here, of course behind the scenes we're doing the planning, but you should also be establishing relationships with each other internally, in this agency. So, most folks know, if you work here you definitely know, that we have three teams, red, white, and blue. They're activated three weeks at a time. They rotate. But you know what, we're really one team. And when something really happens, everybody pitches in, and it's not just one person or one team, it's a full court-press when something does happen.

Andy D'Amora (10:52):

So, one of the things I'll miss about that is definitely relationships. You go to the scene of different jobs, I like to respond to jobs, and that's what you miss, the camaraderie between, not just EM, but FD, PD, DP, and going on the scene and coordinating things, around, just something simple. Well, at times a water main breaker could be rather severe at times also. But just seeing the progress of jobs, how they develop, how they've been rectified. That's one of the things I will miss, is seeing how things progress. Because it's actually exciting when you see things come full circle.

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Allison Pennisi (11:32): Speaking with Commissioner, Andrew D'Amora of New York City Emergency Management and dedicated public servant. It is "rapid response time." And if you are a first time listener, it's simple, "Prep Talk" will ask questions and our guest will give the first answer that comes to mind.

Speaker 5 (11:49):

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

Christina Farrell (11:58):

All right. So here's the first question. What's the emergency item you can't live without.

Andy D'Amora (12:02):

Well, I'm going to bounce it to you. What do you think it is? If you had to guess one word, me. Start's with an F.

Christina Farrell (12:10):

Food.

Andy D'Amora (12:10):

Thank you, good for Christina. All right. Activation, food. I'll miss that too. I forgot to say that.

Allison Pennisi (12:17):

What is your favorite emergency themed movie or TV show?

Andy D'Amora (12:20):

Well, just to be a bipartisan here, I'll go PD and FD. So growing up, I loved the show *Emergency!*. It was a fire department in Los Angeles show, in the early seventies. Awesome show. It got me really into... And of course, on the PD side, Adam-12. So that was both in LA ironically, but I love both those shows.

Allison Pennisi (12:41):

No Chips? You're not going to...

Andy D'Amora (12:42):

No, [crosstalk 00:12:43].

Christina Farrell (12:42):

No Law and Order? Like those are...

Andy D'Amora (12:46):

No, no, no. What molded me were those two shows.

Christina Farrell (12:49):

I used to watch *Emergency!* when-

Andy D'Amora ([12:50](#)):

It was great.

Christina Farrell ([12:50](#)):

-when I was young. That was a good show. For all those emergency buffs, that may be a little younger than some of us, I would definitely Google "*Emergency!*" because that was a great show. All right. So this says, what are better, I guess maybe what do you prefer, cold weather emergencies or hot weather emergencies?

Andy D'Amora ([13:10](#)):

Both are equally painful, but...

Christina Farrell ([13:13](#)):

There's no good emergency.

Andy D'Amora ([13:14](#)):

Yeah, I know. I tell you, it's a toss up at times, but I think compounding usually in the summer you have the heat and it's during coastal storm season, so I would have to go with hot weather emergencies are worse.

Allison Pennisi ([13:31](#)):

Hot weather emergencies are worse. Okay. Last but not least, sum up your work at New York City Emergency Management in one word.

Andy D'Amora ([13:37](#)):

One word only? Okay.

Allison Pennisi ([13:39](#)):

If you can.

Andy D'Amora ([13:40](#)):

Dynamic, incredible. I'll use a couple of words.

Allison Pennisi ([13:45](#)):

You get a free pass, because you're Commissioner.

Andy D'Amora ([13:48](#)):

Oh, okay.

Christina Farrell ([13:48](#)):

You can have one per decade. We'll give you three words.

Andy D'Amora (13:50):

All right. Okay. Dynamic. Awesome. And fantastic. I'll sum it up also with a sentence that, those of you listening to this and you work at emergency management, you do an awesome job, never forget it. We've been through a lot the last two years and you really rose to the occasion, and you'll continue to do so in the future. So, thank you.

Andy D'Amora ([14:12](#)):

And I just want to encourage everybody. I'm just a kid from Brooklyn, but one of the main things I've learned is just the experiences of others, capturing what they've done. And just looking at our past Commissioners, Joe Esposito, who's more operational than him. I've learned so much from him throughout the years in PD, and especially here at emergency management. Deanne Criswell, she's Mrs. Emergency management. She's so knowledgeable in this field. I really took a lot of what she did and really learned an awful lot from her. And she's at FEMA right now, of course. And John Scrivani, he really brought it all together. We went through a lot, and for him to come in here and just bring a sense of calm and common sense leadership to this place really taught us a lot.

Andy D'Amora ([15:02](#)):

And I take all three of them and just, I try to mold myself in these last few months and take those lessons we learned during those years, and just really used that to my advantage. And really, I think it helped our agency a lot.

Andy D'Amora ([15:17](#)):

And I'd really be remiss if I didn't mention the heart and soul of this place for many, many years was Calvin Drayton. He was a great, great First Deputy Commissioner. He knew the ins and outs of this business, all the agencies. He was a guy that really leaned forward in a lot of things. And I learned so much. Me being here as the First Deputy Commissioner, and prior to that as the Chief of Staff, when Cal was the First of Staff, I learned a lot from him and I took all those lessons and really remembered them, even to this day, and how we could do things right in the city. So, I just want to leave you with that. A lot of things we could do, as we progress in our field. And I encourage each and every one of you just take care of yourselves, look out for one another, because that's the most important thing, is to watch out for each other. So, God bless you all. Thank you.

Allison Pennisi ([16:11](#)):

Thank you for your leadership, and for everything that you've done for us over the last several years, and for what you've done for the City of New York. We really appreciate the time.

Christina Farrell ([16:20](#)):

Yeah. And I would say, I'll get the last one. Everyone's used to that. I would just say you've made the note. At Emergency Management, we have a front office where there's a Chief of Staff, a Commissioner, and a First Deputy Commissioner office. And you've sat in all three of those, the first person to actually sit in two of those, I believe. And certainly to sit in all three. I don't think that will be replicated anytime soon. So, for all these years you had a whole career, you could have retired before you got here. But you stayed. And there were certainly, over the last few years, there were touch points where I'm sure you might have thought about retiring, and you could have moved on with your life. But I think what really kept you here was your commitment to New York City and your commitment to our team.

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Christina Farrell (17:05):

And I just want to say that, because people know I'm not shy to give you my thoughts, and so just thank you for that, because really you were the glue, over these last couple of crazy years, that held that all together, I think for all of us. And I think you've felt a lot of that pressure on your shoulders. You even moved in, for those people who don't know. We have some interim housing next door, a little modular apartment, and during COVID Andy moved in, so he could dedicate himself to work, and also not bring COVID literally home and endanger his family. So, if that's not dedication in public service there, I really don't know what is. So, just thank you. We'll miss you. But we know, we have a lot of food around here and we know you'll come back for the food. So, thank you.

Andy D'Amora (17:50):

Well, thanks Christina. Thanks Allison. Thanks everybody. I really enjoy it. And I love you all.

Speaker 1 (18:00):

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.