

MUSIC: [00:00](#) (music).

Bushra: [00:07](#) 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: [00:27](#) Hello everyone. Thank you for listening. I am Omar Bourne.

Allison Pennisi: [00:30](#) And I'm Allison Pennisi. Thank you for joining us. We want you to come back as often as you can, so feel free to add "Prep Talk" to your favorite RSS feed. You can also follow us on social media.

Omar Bourne: [00:39](#) This episode we are discussing women in the emergency management field. And our guests today have a wealth of knowledge and experience.

Allison Pennisi: [00:48](#) That's right, Omar. We have a panel of experts. Here with us today are Samantha Phillips, director at the National Center for Security and Preparedness at SUNY Albany and former director of Philadelphia Office of Emergency Management.

Omar Bourne: [01:01](#) We also have MaryAnn Tierney who is the Regional Administration for FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] Region Three.

Allison Pennisi: [01:06](#) And last, but not least, we also have New York City Emergency Management Deputy Commissioner for External Affairs, Christina Farrell.

Omar Bourne: [01:14](#) It is an honor to sit down and chat with all of you today about your experience in the field. As I said, as we mentioned, we have a Regional Administrator. Former directors as well. And deputy commissioners. So, my first question, Christina, I'm gonna ask you. What sparked your interest in the field and how did you get started?

C. Farrell: [01:33](#) Well, thank you for having us here today.

Omar Bourne: [01:34](#) Thank you for being here.

C. Farrell: [01:35](#) I came over to the Office of Emergency Management. Actually, tomorrow is my 15-year anniversary.

Allison Pennisi: [01:41](#) Oh wow.

Omar Bourne: [01:42](#) Cool.

C. Farrell: [01:42](#) Started March 3rd, 2003. I was doing grants in the Mayor's Office and a new mayor was coming in so it was time to make a change. I was working in the Mayor's Office when 9/11 happened and I worked on the grants fundraising side for about a year, a little more, after that. And so, I had worked at the pier, worked with people from Emergency Management and other agencies. And so it was kind of a natural extension of some of the work I'd done after 9/11. And I was excited to enter into a new field.

Omar Bourne: [02:13](#) Sam, how about you?

S. Phillips: [02:15](#) Thanks for having me. My story's a little bit of circumstance or happenstance. I decided to do a year of service after undergraduate with the American Red Cross in New Orleans, Louisiana. I'm originally from New York, so that was kind of a new community and a new experience. I really just enjoyed working with the community and doing a year of service responding to disasters. I spent some time in Florida and then many local emergencies in the New Orleans community. That's how it all started.

Omar Bourne: [02:45](#) Wonderful. MaryAnn?

M. Tierney: [02:47](#) Great. Well thank for having me here today. I really appreciate the opportunity to participate in the podcast. When I was in college I did a lot of different internships. I went to school in Washington D.C. And I interned with the Federal Election Commission. And I interned with D.C.'s Emergency Management Agency. And I interned with FEMA. And I really like the internships that I did in Emergency Management. I thought they were different and it mixed policy work with field work and that was something I was interested in. Then, when I graduated, I came back to New York city, 'cause that's where I was born and raised. And I found a job with New York City OEM and it's been really great since.

Allison Pennisi: [03:30](#) So, can you each share with our listeners your experience in the field? How you got to where you are today? Christina, we'll start with you.

- C. Farrell: [03:40](#) So, like I said, I've been here just about 15 years now. And we've had a lot of emergencies during that time. I expanded my role. I came over here as the grant's director and was working ... It was just when the Urban Area Security Initiative, Homeland Security, became an agency a couple days before I actually started here. And so, there was a lot of movement setting things up, getting the different agencies together. And then over time, we were able to put together, create an External Affairs Division and bring in the Ready New York program, our community emergency response team volunteers, the public private work, communications, press, all of the things that come into External Affairs.
- C. Farrell: [04:25](#) And we've just continued to grow. We're about 30 people strong now in External Affairs, which is great. As Sam said, a lot of it is really the work with the community before, during, and after an emergency. Whether it's local like a building collapse or something like that, or city-wide, pretty much how Sandy was, we all ... I live in the city. I'm raising my family in the city and so being able to help New Yorkers during a really vulnerable time is really rewarding.
- Omar Bourne: [04:54](#) Sam, how about you and how you got where you are today?
- S. Phillips: [04:56](#) Yes. So, I studied public health in graduate school. After working with the Red Cross, I wanted to broaden that a little bit. And when I finished graduate school, I also went to school in Washington D.C. like MaryAnn, we actually went to the same college. And I decided to apply for jobs in cities I thought would be both fun to work in and fun to live in. And I ended up in Philly and actually MaryAnn was the director. And had the opportunity to start as an entry-level planner working with the city's ... Philadelphia's Office of Emergency Management. And wasn't quite sure what I was getting into, but decided to just go along for the ride. And 10 years later I had the opportunity to work in a couple of different positions with Philadelphia Emergency Management and spent the last five as the director. So, it was really just finding an organization that was doing some great work and working with some wonderful people and just finding opportunities to contribute in a meaningful way.
- Omar Bourne: [05:55](#) MaryAnn?
- M. Tierney: [05:57](#) So, I started in New York City Emergency Management in July of 1999. Actually my first day, July 19th, which I will never forget, there was a very large power outage in Washington Heights.

There were over a quarter of a million people without power. And I had been waiting a while to get hired. But, like any government job, it takes time. And so finally I got a phone call and they said, "Oh, you've cleared and you can start." And I said, "Oh, when do you want me to start?" And they were like, "How about tonight?" So, I went to work. That evening I worked the night shift in the EOC. And I was hooked. It was great. Working in New York City was amazing. Like I said, I grew up in New York City. My parents still live here. I still have a lot of family here. It was like Christina said, really rewarding to help New Yorkers when they needed help most, right?

M. Tierney: [06:47](#)

And then I had an opportunity to go to Philadelphia and be the director. And that was a really great job. I did that for about four years and we had a great team. And we kind of rebuilt the emergency management function in the city. And it was really exciting to see Sam get promoted as the director when I left. That was nice because it's always good to have home-grown talent take over something and be able to kind of continue all the good work that was happening. And I went to FEMA and I've been at FEMA now for almost eight years. And FEMA's a great job. We've been really busy this past year in particular. But FEMA is on a much larger scale. You're helping people, again, when they need help most. FEMA's allowed me a lot of opportunities to be able to help people and have influence in emergency management policy. It's very rewarding.

Allison Pennisi: [07:37](#)

I mean, it's kind of funny hearing MaryAnn's story about the day that you started. I actually started at New York City Emergency Management nine days before Hurricane Sandy. And I felt the same way, that it took a while for the process to go to get hired. I remember I left my job. I was only away from my old position to come here for maybe about four or five days. I had a nice long weekend and then I came in. And then it was nine days later, it was, "Okay. We're activating our EOC. Okay, these are your plans. Okay, Allison, now go." And it was my trial by fire, so we kind of joke around about that. But I honestly think it was the best way to learn, is to really just dig your heels in and get involved and get started.

Omar Bourne: [08:15](#)

And you're still here, so that's a good thing.

Allison Pennisi: [08:16](#)

Yeah. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Omar Bourne: [08:19](#)

Now, when we looked at events like 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina, especially the latter, which have really shaped the emergency

management field in this century. Can you take us back to emergency management then, pre-Hurricane Katrina, especially? And then where we are now, today?

M. Tierney: [08:38](#) I started in emergency management in 1999, which was, I guess, a very long time ago. It was 19 years or so, almost. And things were different. We had a lot less technology. The internet was not as prevalent as it is now. No one was walking around with a computer in their pocket, so still using pagers. And cell phones weren't as advanced as they are now. So, in terms of technology, it was a lot less sophisticated. I think the fundamentals of emergency management are still the same. I think how we execute emergency management is very different. So, we shelter people. We write plans for different kinds of emergencies. We certainly did that back then and we do that now.

M. Tierney: [09:23](#) I think some of the bigger events that have happened since 1999 have certainly helped us think about how to scale up our response. And also to think about how to better integrate the public into what we're doing and making them a partner in the response and recovery as opposed to people that just take direction from government. I think we've evolved that a lot. And I think the use of technology has really helped us make better decisions, be aware of what's happening, especially the emergence of social media has really helped with that. And Twitter plays a huge role in emergency response and disaster response now. I think the fundamentals are the same, but I think there's a lot of things in how we execute and how we integrate and interact with our partners and the public that have changed drastically.

Omar Bourne: [10:10](#) And I like the point you brought up about community being involved 'cause we work a lot with the community here in New York City. And obviously with FEMA as well. And I'm sure in Philadelphia with the CERT, Community Emergency Response Team, volunteers, the CERT volunteers we call them, and even now, expanding to work with houses of worship and other integral parts of communities. And so, I think it's great to see that community involvement plays a very key role in emergency management and where we are today.

M. Tierney: [10:50](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

S. Phillips: [10:53](#) I think you've also seen the emergency management field become its own discipline. So, these big events, you've talked

about 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, Superstorm Sandy, and of course, all of the disasters from this fall, I think are going to be these events that really define the emergency management discipline. And I think people are really becoming practitioners. MaryAnn's exactly right. The fundamentals haven't necessarily shifted all that much, but the ability to integrate technology, integrate the community, and really kind of learn from the discipline ... And I also think we're seeing this emergence of an academic community that's focused on emergency management. It used to be very much law enforcement, fire fighting, public health, and we now actually have young people wanting to enter this field-

Omar Bourne: [11:42](#)

Yeah. Going to school for it.

S. Phillips: [11:42](#)

Right out of college who are academically trained. So, it's gonna be this really interesting convergence of experience, education, community stakeholders. So, it's really shifting a lot.

C. Farrell: [11:55](#)

I agree. I think also, I was here ... The first big activation I was at was the blackout in 2003. So, looking at that and then also looking at Hurricane Sandy, OEM, we coordinate. We go out and we would work with all our partners like the police department, fire department. But some of their agencies, I think, and I know, that they didn't really think that emergency management pertained to them or that they needed to have emergency management plans as much. Our whole continuity of operations program, which is a large program for the city to make sure ... Was because after the blackout in 2003, people didn't know how to get in touch with each other phones weren't working-

Omar Bourne: [12:32](#)

Right.

C. Farrell: [12:33](#)

And it was 2003, so technology wasn't where it is today. But even during Hurricane Sandy we saw a lot of technology fails. So while it's great that all this technology has happened, sometimes ... I mean, after Sandy we had to make fliers and go stand on street corners and give people fliers. So, I think there's that piece. And now there's a lot of ... We have a fellowship here, the John Solomon Fellowship for graduate students in emergency management. And the placements are places like Department for the Aging. And people don't always think of that as an emergency management place, but they take care of some very vulnerable New Yorkers-

Omar Bourne: [13:06](#)

That's true.

- C. Farrell: [13:07](#) Obviously the Red Cross is part of that. Department of Education is a huge partner of ours. Social services. So I think it's also expanded academically, but also just within all different disciplines that everybody realizes that they need to have a plan, they need to exercise, they need to be prepared.
- Allison Pennisi: [13:22](#) Now, we sort of touched upon this, about how the field has evolved. What are things that the public or even government are still learning maybe about the emergency management field that they should know? Or maybe there are things that they don't realize that emergency management actually does?
- S. Phillips: [13:39](#) So, I'll start. I think that, especially following this fall, there's probably a lot of thinking about what emergency management can do from a scalability and a capability perspective. Just kind of being a witness to the disasters and not necessarily are a participant of them. And even hearing the current FEMA administrator really talk about mitigation and resilience and kind of this, almost, as a paradigm shift in the community and really thinking more strategically about the field of emergency management and capabilities. And I think you see that with these big events. It's kind of a time to kind of regroup and look at the discipline moving forward.
- Omar Bourne: [14:17](#) MaryAnn?
- M. Tierney: [14:18](#) I think the thing that I would add to that is the thinking about how the public is a critical part of the emergency response chain. It's not just fire and police. In most disasters, the first people that are gonna help you are your neighbors. If it's a tornado in Kansas or a flood in the Rockaways, or even a house fire somewhere in North Philadelphia, it is your neighbor that's gonna pick up the phone and likely call 9-1-1 for you if you can't. It's your neighbor that's gonna pull that sheet of plywood off of your house to try to rescue you. Those are the first people coming to help you and we need to do a better job of helping the public understand their role, their critical role, and give them tools so that they can act in that role effectively. So whether it's learning how to stop bleeding or learning how to turn off your gas or water service so you can prevent more damage and more destruction. I think that's a direction we need to go in.
- M. Tierney: [15:18](#) And I think for the profession of emergency management and government in general, it is sometimes difficult to reconcile government's role in command and control with integrating

what can often be seen as a very chaotic public response. But it's really critical because in these larger, more catastrophic events, we are gonna be just as reliant on our traditional 9-1-1, police, fire, services, as we are on the public to step in and take a role.

Omar Bourne: [15:45](#)

And I like what you mentioned about the public preparation. And Christina, I know you work a lot with us here in that role and trying to get the public to understand the importance of being prepared. And just the simple basics of having a plan, knowing what you're gonna do in the time of an emergency, so that when the emergency comes you're not acting on a whim, so to speak. It's always great when we can hit home the point that preparedness is extremely important, especially in emergency management today.

Allison Pennisi: [16:21](#)

Mm-hmm (affirmative). And we always talk about this continuity of preparedness going from the individual to the community. And people know what FEMA is, especially during disasters. And they also get to know the local emergency management agencies during disasters as well, but what efforts are being taken to build relationships when there aren't emergencies? Like during our blue sky times?

Omar Bourne: [16:42](#)

The blue sky times.

Allison Pennisi: [16:44](#)

Yup.

C. Farrell: [16:44](#)

So, I can talk, obviously, about what we're doing in this city. And you've mentioned some of it. We have a very big CERT program. We have over 1,000 volunteers. We have volunteers out today. It's a stormy day. We have them out checking catch basins. They're very passionate, dedicated volunteers.

Omar Bourne: [17:00](#)

Right.

C. Farrell: [17:00](#)

And the great thing about them is that they are of their community. They speak many different languages, just like all other New Yorkers. They've grown up in these communities. They know who the leaders are, the elected leaders and the official leaders, and then also the unofficial leaders, the rabbis, and people like that, that can be helpful with us. And they're really ambassadors because we go out. We get paid to say these things. We work. But they're doing this of their own time, of their own volition. And a lot of them have been in a fire, were

evacuated, had to evacuate during Hurricane Sandy, or have been in those things so they really understand.

- C. Farrell: [17:39](#) We also, as you know, are using things like Ready Girl, Emergency Management's superhero who goes out to school and talks to kids in pre-K, to young kids, and makes it fun. And they understand that you don't need to be a superhero to be prepared. We have a senior outreach coordinator who's 74, who has lived a very full life and now he chooses to go out and talk to other seniors. So I think really meeting people where they are. Having people that understand the community and can go and talk to them, and not overwhelming people. You can make preparedness your life's work or you can sign up for NotifyNYC. You can pack a Go Bag. You can do a couple small things to make yourself that much better.
- M. Tierney: [18:24](#) I think the emergency management community wholesale, whether at the local, state, or federal level, have often all embraced this notion of individual preparedness. Have a Go Bag, know how to shelter-in-place, and have some supplies to do that. Have a plan. But I think that we've started to add social engagement through technology, social media. I think, again as Christina said, meeting people where they are. If it happens to just be through a smart phone, then that's a great connection point. I think we've also started to expand this community preparedness as well. So CERT program's a great example of that. Before I left Philly, and it's really thriving now, they've started Ready Community. So it's basically taking this individual concept, applying it to a neighborhood or community as large, really recognizing what MaryAnn mentioned, is that neighborhoods and communities are the foundation to what we do and if we don't give them the tools and the opportunities to be resilient, to be prepared, and really help first responders, we're working much harder than we need to.
- Omar Bourne: [19:27](#) Right. Right. Great points. Now, Sam, I know during your time as director of Philly's Emergency Management, you had the AMTRAK derailment. MaryAnn and Christina, we look at Hurricane Katrina, Hurricane Sandy, to name a few of the blackouts. What do you think has been your toughest days on the job or day on the job thus far? And we'll start with you.
- S. Phillips: [19:53](#) Yeah. So AMTRAK is a big event. And obviously compared to 9/11, Superstorm Sandy, I think size and scalability starts to have little meaning when you're talking about people losing lives or getting injured or losing their homes or that kind of

thing. It sort of doesn't matter. In some ways though, the big events have. There's some benefit to the big events in that they're sort of resource-rich. People are very interested in getting involved and interested in helping. You kind of have a community coming together. When I think about my time in Philadelphia, it was the events that got no recognition from the media and really challenged communities that I think were my hardest days. And MaryAnn will probably remember this well from her time in Philadelphia. We have this operation that we used to do called the cease and vacate. And it was basically when generally an apartment building had just been so poorly taken care of that it was no longer safe for a community to live there. And is it a disaster? Maybe by the traditional sense, no. But to those families, absolutely. And the challenge with an event like that is you don't really have the resources that you have in a disaster to help these people get back on their feet and find new homes.

S. Phillips: [21:17](#) So I think emergency management is starting to get involved in a lot of things that don't traditionally seem like disasters, but are because we have people who no longer have homes. They're being displaced from their communities. But again, we're trying to problem-solve without the resources that we are familiar with having available to us. And those are really kind of hard and really tear at your heartstrings.

M. Tierney: [21:40](#) I think for me, now I've been doing this almost 20 years and have been involved in a lot of very large events from 9/11 to Hurricane Maria this past November. What I find in all of those events, and all of them have their own individual tough points, and like Sam said, there's lot of events that don't even make the news, but emergency management is heavily engaged in or just really affecting people's lives with a single house fire, that really isn't going to get, obviously not a FEMA response, but maybe even local emergency management may not be there. Those people still need as much help as the person who lost their house in a flood or a hurricane.

M. Tierney: [22:26](#) What I find the most frustrating and challenging in my work is when I can't get the programs that we deliver to integrate in a way that I know a survivor needs to get assistance. And so, when I feel like we have not done that well, that's frustrating. And that's, I think, a sad point for me because there is so much assistance that, whether it's FEMA or a city government or a state government can provide, and a lot of what emergency managers do is navigate that bureaucracy to weave those

programs together to provide a solution for the survivor. And so its frustrating when you can't make that happen, or the laws and authorities aren't able to make that happen. So, we're always striving, I think, to do that better. That exists in every event and that is, I think, very frustrating for any first responder or emergency manager.

C. Farrell: [23:19](#) I'm just gonna go for a specific day. I have to say the night that Hurricane Sandy was hitting. Like, the zero hour. Because we knew it was coming obviously. And it built up. But we knew, with the European model that for a week ... And there was that one reporter from the Wall Street Journal who knew it was coming. And so we were planning. We were here on the weekend, of course. We were doing 24-hour shifts. And then that Monday, as Con Ed started to tell that they were gonna take off different grids ... And I remember I was sitting up in the emergency operations center with Mark Clampett, who was our director of Watch Command, who came from the fire department, is a volunteer firefighter in Long Island, who had worked like 30 years. And he was just sitting there saying, "I can't believe this is happening." And when you see someone like that, who's this tough guy and this has been his life and he's been through so many things. And when you see him sitting there, it was really just sobering.

C. Farrell: [24:12](#) And it was really the time, right? All our plans were in place. We knew that there was starting to be issues with 9-1-1 and other things were happening. And you kind of then, when the storm was here, you had to let it ride. And that was a difficult moment to ... And then, after a few hours, we started coming into recovery. But that was a really difficult evening. I don't think I'll ever forget that night at all, 'cause I remember doing the overnight shift for that and getting the reports that there are major fires and Breezy Point, that people were without power and getting the different reports from ... Then hearing that hospitals had to be evacuated. And it was just ... There were so many things that were going on.

C. Farrell: [24:53](#) And even on a personal side of things, one of my sisters-in-law was actually at NYU. She had surgery to get a brain tumor removed and she was one of the patients that was evacuated from NYU to be taken to St. Luke's Roosevelt. And I remember asking our health and medical director what else can you, besides everything else that's going on, what could you tell me about these hospitals, so I know that she's going to be safe. So just even hearing that. And also hearing about Mark, about him

saying, "Wow, I can't believe this is actually happening." It's sobering. You don't realize the gravity of an emergency until you're actually in the thick of it.

Omar Bourne: [25:29](#) Yeah. And I wasn't in emergency management field at that point. I was working the news desk and just being at a news desk and seeing the fires in Breezy Point and the evacuations of some of the hospitals. And you're just, you're working and you're looking at it, and you're just amazed. Wow, this is actually happening. So, I can understand, from your perspective being in the field and having the plans and working to try to help those people, how you feel and how it hits home. How close to home emotionally. But that's what emergency management is all about. It's about trying to help people and to give them the resources to be able to plan and be prepared, as prepared as possible, before the disasters strike.

Allison Pennisi: [26:23](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative). Now another question for the three of you. We were talking about your hardest day, but what accomplishments stand out? Like, a lot of times we'll say, "Oh, I wish that this went better." But there has to be one day, or maybe even five days, that you say, "Wow, this went really, really well. This was a great success for us. I'm really proud of what I was able to do in this field."

S. Phillips: [26:47](#) So, from an event perspective, I think having AMTRAK, the Papal visit, the Democratic National Convention in the stretch of about 16 months time is sort of just a chunk of my life that I am generally proud of. But I think outside of specific events, I'm really proud of the team that I was able to work with in Philly and had a part of building. Even now, I've been gone nearly a year, and I follow them pretty closely. And just to even see how that team is continuing to grow and do these amazing things. And even see how people internally are being promoted. It's a recognition of their work and commitment and dedication to this field. So I think those are my proudest moments, to see that personal growth and achievement in the field. Particularly when we're talking about young women. There are ... We have a Watch Commander in Philly OEM that was just promoted to be the program manager. And just seeing that from afar is a really amazing, proud moment for me. Certainly not my accomplishment, but I feel so pleased for her and really just proud of that development.

Omar Bourne: [28:05](#) MaryAnn, how about you?

- M. Tierney: [28:05](#) Yeah. I think for me, I think there's three things I'll offer. So, when I worked in New York City Emergency Management, I was in charge of planning. And before I was in charge of planning, I was a planner. So I spent most of my time in New York City Emergency Management doing planning work. And as a planner, you write these plans and you have all these meetings and people don't come to the meetings or they don't do what you ask them to do after the meeting. So planning can be very tedious and frustrating. And I remember we had ... We developed these little field guides for some of our plans. We did one for the heat plan and one for the power outage plan. And they were like little pocketbooks that you could walk around with. And I remember we had a heat event. And everybody brought their plan with them. And all the agencies had it and we used it, and it worked. And I was really proud of that 'cause we'd actually developed something that our stakeholders were using and it was helping them do their job better. And so that was really rewarding.
- M. Tierney: [28:58](#) To build off what Sam was saying about Philly OEM, I'm very proud of the time that I spent there. We worked really hard as a team to rebuild and reinvigorate emergency management in Philadelphia and I also still, I haven't worked there for seven plus years now and I still follow them very regular. Also, I live in Philadelphia, so I'm heavily vested in the success of Emergency Management. All of their successes make me so proud of the work that we did at the very beginning when it was a lot harder. It was less resources, smaller team. And I feel like we all, Sam included, even those very early days, did a lot to set conditions so that success could continue. And that's very rewarding.
- M. Tierney: [29:42](#) And then I think personally, like I said I've been with FEMA now almost eight years. I was deployed to Puerto Rico for about a month in November. And I think that's some of the most rewarding work I've ever done. Period. Helping survivors directly. I was in charge of FEMA's Individual Assistance operation and I felt a sense of urgency that I hadn't felt in a very long time about the things I did in this hour, in three hours were actually going to affect survivors. And getting out and talking to survivors and getting the team motivated and really coalescing around some really important things that we were working on was really rewarding. And so, that was reinvigorating for me in emergency management. I'm really happy that I was able to do that in help people. And I'm really proud of that work.

- C. Farrell: [30:30](#) I think it's a little similar here. When I came to OEM it was 60 people and now it's about 240. Like I said, we created the External Affairs Division. And so, really seeing the growth of the field, but then also seeing the growth here moving into our headquarters. When I first started we were in a warehouse under the Brooklyn Bridge, hoping things didn't fall off the bridge, literally, onto us and our cars. So, it's really, like you said, people get degrees now in emergency management. Everything is much more institutionalized, which is good and speaks to the field.
- C. Farrell: [31:06](#) I'll also say, within External Affairs, what I'm really proud of is our team and kind of our entrepreneurial spirit. We just did a winter weather video using a standup comedian. That's not, I think, something most people would go to in a linear sense for how are we gonna talk about winter weather. But it's about keeping it fresh. I mean, how many times can you tell people how to shovel-
- Omar Bourne: [31:31](#) Bundle up.
- C. Farrell: [31:32](#) And how to bundle up. How to wear layers. Like, in New York, it's hard to get attention. It's hard when there's not an emergency getting the press and getting people to talk about emergencies is really difficult. And like I said, we have a superhero. And this came from the staff up. None of these are my ideas. But knowing as a manager when to ... What ideas might be a little far-flung and what other ideas you could really take and run with it. I'm proud of that.
- Omar Bourne: [32:02](#) And I will say personally, we're happy to have you here leading us on the External Affairs team. I'm part of your External Affairs team and just knowing that we can come to you with those different ideas. And I mean, the podcast, obviously we have an emergency management podcast now. And knowing that we can come to you with these ideas and you'll point us in the right direction for me, is heartwarming and we appreciate that.
- Allison Pennisi: [32:30](#) Yup. I have to second that too. So, Sam, you're now working as Director at the National Center for Security and Preparedness in SUNY Albany. What is your new role like and how is it different from being a director for the Philadelphia Office of Emergency Management?
- S. Phillips: [32:47](#) It's entirely different. I'm no longer providing hands-on work with the community, which I miss and certainly a downside of

the new position. I am working with first responders very closely, and we develop a lot of curriculum and deliver training to first responders. And then also working with students has been really wonderful and obviously working with some really elite faculty members. And kind of getting involved in their research. And the college itself, the College of Emergency Preparedness, Homeland Security, and Cyber Security is the first in the nation. It was actually started in partnership with Governor Cuomo after Superstorm Sandy, really recognizing that the impact to New York and needing to make sure that we were doing everything possible as a community and a discipline to be better prepared for those things including the at the academic level. So it's completely different. I miss my old life tremendously, but I'm really trying to kind of embrace just a different experience for a period of time.

S. Phillips: [33:48](#) And working with students is incredibly rewarding. Just how passionate and interested they are in learning the field and getting involved. It's really wonderful to see that rigor and commitment to an emerging discipline.

Omar Bourne: [34:05](#) And I like the fact that you brought up the students. Everyone has kind of mentioned how there are more people who are actually studying emergency management today than there was in the past. So, my question for you Sam and for anyone else who may wanna chime in, what do you say to those students, you deal with them directly, about their endeavors and wanting to get into the field?

S. Phillips: [34:29](#) So I say a couple of things. One, it's wonderful that we have academic programs, but that's not it. That's not enough. So we really need a combination of some academic and maybe, perhaps, formal training. But you need experience as well. And you need to be involved. So I teach a couple of courses at the University and what I say to my students on the first night is, "Let's be present. We have three hours together once a week to just be really engaged and to learn from one another and to be knowledgeable about the field. To learn the discipline, jump on Twitter, see what people are saying. Just become a well-informed part of the emergency management community. So, come to class, do your work, but also get involved. Whether it's volunteering, internships, Saturday mornings installing smoke detectors in people's homes. All of that helps and it's a complete package to make somebody an emergency manager."

Allison Pennisi: [35:30](#) So, just switching gears here. We spoke with Sam about her shift from working as Director of Philadelphia OEM, now working at SUNY Albany. MaryAnn, what would you say is your region's biggest strengths and challenges in terms of emergency management? As FEMA Region Three Administrator, you cover a lot of different territories and you could probably speak to that. I'm really curious to get your perspective.

M. Tierney: [35:57](#) That's a really good question. I mean, I think the first thing I'll say about our strengths is that we have a really great team. We've got, there's about 225 people that work in FEMA region three. We've worked really hard to help them be prepared for the worst day we're gonna have in the region, whether that's a hurricane or some other event. So, in emergency management it is all about the people and we have really good people. So I think that's a huge strength for us. We also have a great larger emergency management team. We have really engaged state emergency management directors in the region who are very progressive in their thinking and want to work together as a team. And that makes the job a lot easier. When everybody is growing in the same direction, that makes everything easier to do.

M. Tierney: [36:44](#) I think some of our challenges are, we have a lot of hazards that could happen in the region. And a lot of different circumstances for people. We've got Philadelphia, which is the largest city in the region. We've got the national capital region with all of its historic sites and it's the seat of government. And then we've got the hollers of West Virginia. And so there's a lot of different hazards that could be impacted. There's different populations. There's different population density and so kind of navigating all of that during any event is challenging. In our region, our whole region could be impacted by a single event. So for example, if a nor'easter is occurring, we could have coastal flooding and coastal erosion, and inland power outages from the wind. And we've got to be able to kind of mix and match all of that and kind of stay on top of everything. So I think those are some of our strengths and challenges.

Allison Pennisi: [37:44](#) And Christina, I mean, New York City Emergency Management is obviously in the home of the biggest city in the country. What would you say the strengths and challenges are for us?

C. Farrell: [37:53](#) I think that actually the strength of New Yorkers as people living in this city, is both an asset and a challenge. Because just people's daily commute they can view as a disaster. And people

have said that over the last few months. And so people are used to getting around in the city. If the train isn't working, they're gonna take a bus or they're gonna walk or they're gonna call an Uber. They're used to being quick on their feet and getting through it. Which is great. And that resiliency is really important.

- C. Farrell: [38:26](#) But that also can stand in the way of people getting prepared and people planning ahead because they're used to getting through things. And we're here to make it not be so difficult. To mitigate that, to help them. So that is, I think, plays on both sides. I think another thing is just the immigrant nature, the transient nature, sometimes of the city. People moving in and out, coming from other places, making sure that we can meet everybody. Like we were saying, meeting people where they are. And not everybody is going to go if we put up a Ready New York night or something. That's not what people want to do. They want us to come to them. And then also sometimes people have a negative view of government. They've left where they live because of what was going on in their country. So, the first thing they want to do when they come here is not get more advice from the government.
- Omar Bourne: [39:16](#) That's true.
- C. Farrell: [39:18](#) So, that can be a big challenge. That is why CERT, our community volunteers, are so important. That's why making our materials available in their native language, so they can read it and understand. Those, I think, are really important and can be some challenges.
- Omar Bourne: [39:34](#) Another question that all of our listeners would be interested to hear the answers to this, and MaryAnn, I'm gonna start with you. As an emergency manager, what keeps you up at night?
- M. Tierney: [39:45](#) Well, I can tell you as a mom, my five-year-old keeps me up at night.
- Allison Pennisi: [39:49](#) I second that.
- M. Tierney: [39:51](#) But not much as an emergency manager keeps me up. I get that question a lot. And I think ... For me, the things that concern me are will we be late to need? By that I mean, will we recognize that something is happening where we can change the outcome and be positioned to do that timely? And so we're very focused on being ready and being aware of what's happening around us

and being positioned so if somebody needs help, we're there with the resources when they need them and we're not late in making that happen. So that's something ... I wouldn't say it keeps me up at night, but it's something that I'm constantly cognizant of and working towards.

M. Tierney: [40:34](#) I think the more traditional answer to that question is the event that causes me the most pause, we actually just saw this summer, which is a very long duration power outage. Especially in ... And this is something we've talked about for quite some time in emergency management. If you don't have power, everything is just harder. It's harder for people. It's harder to deliver an effective response. It's harder to recover.

M. Tierney: [40:59](#) And I think we had a really profound event in Puerto Rico in terms of the power outage that's still ongoing. I mean, there are still people to this day in Puerto Rico that do not have power and have not had power since Hurricane Irma. And there's a lot of effort to make that better, but they're still not gonna have power for quite some time. And I think in our society where everything is connected to the internet and our reliance on power and everything else that power gives us, is something that we have got to be better prepared for. That is a catastrophic event. It's something that has spawned a lot of the cascading human requirements, human need, in Puerto Rico, is the lack of power. So I think that's a lesson that we all need to examine and take heed and be prepared as individuals, as communities, and as the government, we have got to look at the power outage as a lesson that we need to learn and really think about.

Omar Bourne: [42:06](#) Christina, how about you [crosstalk 00:42:07]?

C. Farrell: [42:08](#) I have to say no-notice events. Those are the things that I think really are, could be, obviously so tough. If we're looking at something ... Obviously 9/11 happened here. Last fall we had the events on Halloween and the Port Authority, which were horrible but could've been much, much worse. And I think everybody in this city, whenever something happens, that everybody freezes for one second and wonders, "Is this terrorism? Is this gonna be the next 9/11?" And then also, just along with that though, in the last few years, we unfortunately had the East Harlem building explosion the year after we had the East Village explosion where as Sam noted, it was much less. We were lucky, actually, that the loss of life was smaller than it could've been, but it still tore families apart and ended lives

tragically. And so, those no-notice things, those really ... Because you don't know when the next one's coming, you don't know the scale of it, who it's gonna affect, so that for me is the greatest challenge.

- Omar Bourne: [43:09](#) Sam, from the academic perspective, I guess?
- S. Phillips: [43:12](#) Very little in academia keeps you up at night. I will say that.
- Allison Pennisi: [43:15](#) But grading papers.
- Omar Bourne: [43:16](#) Yeah.
- S. Phillips: [43:17](#) That's been the best part of this change. But I think if you're part of this field, you're always just thinking about it. And so, for me, I think about the organization I'm currently running and are we running as efficiently as possible? Are we running as smoothly as possible? And then certainly in Philly I think it was just could we be ready at all times? Emergency management, we've all talked about the size of organizations still relatively small. FEMA being 200 plus people and New York City being 200 plus people, Philly was 30 people. So bigger than they were, but still really small. And so thinking about how to manage a workforce when something really significant happens given that 200 is small and you're not even gonna have probably all 200 available at once.
- Allison Pennisi: [44:06](#) Right. Absolutely. Where do you see emergency management in this country in the next five years?
- S. Phillips: [44:14](#) So MaryAnn and Christina have talked about a few of the ... I think the continued emersion and growth of technology will be huge. Machine learning, artificial intelligence. I mean, we're really just scraping the tip of the iceberg when we think about technology. Social media. We think that's cutting edge and interesting. And it's probably not really when you think about what can be done from a technological perspective. But I think also just this ... Stronger partnerships with the private sector. When you're thinking about supply chain and logistics operations. I think government's been trying to do a lot of that themselves in some cases and I think that there might be these really interesting partnerships that are born out of things like these extended longer-term catastrophic power outages that MaryAnn was describing, and really just trying to kind of rethink business practices.

- M. Tierney: [45:14](#) I am so glad you asked that question because I've been finding ... I've been looking for a way to talk about FEMA's priorities without sounding like a bureaucrat. So, we have a new administrator, Brock Long. He has been doing a phenomenal job of getting us through the hurricanes of 2017 and getting us ready for hurricane season 2018, which is less than 100 days away, not that I'm counting or anything.
- Allison Pennisi: [45:37](#) I don't think any of us are counting.
- M. Tierney: [45:39](#) And he has three priorities. For me, they're easy to talk about because they're priorities that I share as well. And I think in the next five years, they're not just priorities for FEMA. I think these are things that the professions should be looking at. So the first one is building a culture of preparedness. How do we help people be more prepared for events when we know they're gonna be the first people that respond to them? So I think that, if we can get the profession, the community, to take hold of that, I think that will be a big game changer for us in the next five years.
- M. Tierney: [46:15](#) The second priority is being ready for catastrophic disasters. Obviously that's born from the trial by fire that he went through with this past hurricane season, but I think that's something FEMA has been looking at for a long time. I think larger emergency management community's been looking at it. So, what can we do to be ready for those most severe events? And we get very bogged down in the smaller events and the medium sized events, and that eats up bandwidth to be thinking about and planning and preparing for these bigger events. So, how do we get focused on America's worst day or New York's worst day or Philly's worst day? We've gotta get focused on that because that's gonna make us better when that day comes.
- M. Tierney: [46:57](#) And then the third thing is simplifying FEMA. So inside of any federal agency, I'm sure just like ... I worked in New York City. Very big government, lots of process. Lots of bureaucracy. Lots of programs. So, how do we make everybody's interactions with FEMA simpler? So survivors don't have to go through multiple housing inspections. So that when you, as another government agency, are interacting with FEMA, that is a smoother, simpler experience. And I think that will also change, not just the community, but for survivors. Helping survivors. Making it easy for them to access services when they don't have the bandwidth to navigate a byzantine bureaucracy. I think that's really gonna be a game changer for us as well.

- C. Farrell: [47:42](#) I think in New York, it's continuing our focus on non-English speakers, on the vulnerable populations, getting our message out. Right now you can get Notify NYC messages in 13 languages, but you have to navigate some English to get to that second language. Within a year and a half, you'll be able to get messages in real-time, straight in one of six languages, which will be great and really getting to those populations. So I think that as we're able to grow, which has been great for us, we're, like Sam said, we're always gonna be relatively small. But each person that we bring on, I feel like they can train 10 people and then they train 10 people. It just keeps going. And so, I think just in, like I said, all the other agencies, our fellowship, all the things we're doing to define emergency management and to get it out so that people actually know we exist and what we do, that really is gonna help the city as we prepare.
- Omar Bourne: [48:40](#) Some wonderful conversation that we're having here. Just looking at women in emergency management, where we've been in the field in the past and how we look to the future. Our last question here. Is there anything else that you would like to add to our listeners about the emergency management field, about your experience?
- C. Farrell: [49:02](#) I would just say, personally it's been very rewarding for me. I think one thing, and people have asked me this, I have four kids now and my husband works. They say, "How do you manage all of that?" And I think that emergency management is actually a really flexible field. For better, for worse, there's overnights as everybody has alluded to. There's midnight shift, there's weekends. There's things like that. And so, like after Hurricane Sandy, I mostly worked midnight shifts. Which may be difficult for me personally, but for my family, to be there when my kids came home from school, to actually see my husband once in a while, that really worked well for me. I think also technology, being able to run conference calls from home. Be able to log on and do things. I mean emergency management is an all-encompassing field, so having the tools to make it easier to do the work remotely, that has been really helpful. But I think it's a great field that people should check out.
- Omar Bourne: [50:00](#) Sam?
- S. Phillips: [50:01](#) I would say get involved. And Christina started in the mayor's office working on grants. MaryAnn is a policy person. And I started from kind of a public health background and we've all found ourselves in this discipline at some point in our lives. And

my advice would be join. Get involved. Especially young women. It's so great to see the field diversifying. And emergency management can also be an intro to other really interesting disciplines as well. I always, when I was trying to recruit people in Philadelphia I said, if you wanna work in local government at some point in your life, emergency management's a great way to get into local government because you get to meet so many different stakeholders and partner with people. You touch a lot of different parts of government, community, private sector, so it's a really great just opportunity to kind of network and get involved.

M. Tierney: [51:03](#) Yeah, and I think I'll add to what Christina was talking about. I think it's certainly not a 9:00 to 5:00 job, I will say that. But there are a lot of flexibilities in terms of being able to work remotely and do things at home and work the midnight shift, but be home for your kids. It's certainly there. I think, I have a son, he's five and a half. My husband is very supportive. Obviously he works too. I think you need to have a support network in any job. If you're a woman or a man, frankly, in any job, and you have a family and kids, and responsibilities, you need to have a support network, and you need to have a really good partnership and that's been very helpful to me professionally. And so I think that's really important.

M. Tierney: [51:51](#) And I think it is ... I think women sometimes are put of by quote unquote public safety, and I think emergency management is a really great place for women and men to work together and to build the skills that you need to work anywhere, whether it's in local government, or you wanna go in the private sector, the skills are very transferable. A lot of the fundamentals of emergency management are things that would make you successful at any job, like facilitating a meeting or being able to provide a briefing to somebody. Those are things you've gotta do in any job. So I always tell people, if you wanna learn how to be successful in any job, come be an emergency manager 'cause that's what'll make you successful no matter where you go.

Omar Bourne: [52:35](#) Beautiful.

Allison Pennisi: [52:36](#) I think all of this has been really insightful and very inspiring, especially as a woman in emergency management as well. Sorry Omar. I know that you can probably empathize in different ways.

C. Farrell: [52:49](#) You're outnumbered today.

Allison Pennisi: [52:49](#) You're outnumbered, but that's okay.

Omar Bourne: [52:51](#) That is okay.

Allison Pennisi: [52:51](#) But we really appreciate you all taking the time to speak with us and to share these insights with our listeners too.

Omar Bourne: [52:57](#) Yeah, there's a lot that I've learned just chatting with all of you and so I thank you for everything that you've done in the field. And look forward to more years in emergency management, myself, working with Christina, MaryAnn too.

Allison Pennisi: [53:12](#) Some day we're all gonna work for MaryAnn.

Omar Bourne: [53:13](#) Yeah. Yeah.

M. Tierney: [53:16](#) Well, thanks for the opportunity. This was really wonderful.

Omar Bourne: [53:18](#) Thank you for being here.

S. Phillips: [53:19](#) Thank you.

C. Farrell: [53:20](#) Great. Thank you.

Speaker 1: [53:21](#) That's this edition 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.