

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.

C. Farrell: [00:29](#) And I am Christina Farrell.

Omar Bourne: [00:31](#) 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 add "Prep Talk" to your favorite RSS feed. You can follow us on social media on our Twitter @nycemergencymgt, Facebook, or Instagram.

C. Farrell: [00:51](#) On this episode of "Prep Talk," Deanne Criswell, the new commissioner here at New York City Emergency Management, joins us.

Omar Bourne: [00:57](#) Commissioner Criswell is a nationally recognized leader in the emergency management field, with more than 25 years of experience in federal, military, and local government response. She has also spent time in the private sector.

C. Farrell: [01:11](#) Commissioner Criswell spent six years at FEMA. She is also a retired member of the Colorado Air National Guard, where she served 21 years as both a firefighter and deputy fire chief. In addition, she worked for a city of Aurora, Colorado, and served as that city's emergency manager.

Omar Bourne: [01:29](#) But before Commissioner Criswell joins us, it is time to give our listeners the latest hot topics in the emergency management field.

Speaker 4: [01:38](#) Here's your "Prep Talk" Situation Report.

C. Farrell: [01:42](#) This is the Situation Report. Let's get started.

Omar Bourne: [01:45](#) Thank you, Christina. Now July is Disability Pride Month here in New York City. Its mission is to promote inclusion and awareness of people with disabilities to redefine public perception. At New York City Emergency Management, we work closely with members of the disabilities, access, and functional needs communities to ensure that they are prepared for a host of emergencies. To learn how we do that, you can visit

nyc.gov/emergencymanagement. Don't forget, New York City's annual Disability Pride Parade is Sunday, July 14th. Our staff and community emergency response teams will be participating. If you're in town, come out and support. We gather at Madison Square Park at 10:00 AM on that Sunday. And the parade proceeds down Broadway to Union Square Park beginning at 11:00 AM. This is a great parade, and we encourage everyone to come out and support.

- C. Farrell: [02:42](#) Definitely. I'll be there. I know a lot of our staff will be there, so everyone should come out. It's a very inspirational morning. Switching gears, New York City officials have declared a climate emergency. It is all to mobilize local and national responses to address global warming. The New York City Council passed the resolution, calling for an immediate response to the global climate crisis. More than 670 governments in 15 countries have declared climate emergencies according to data from Innovation for Cool Earth Forum. In May 2019, England became the first national government to declare a climate emergency.
- Omar Bourne: [03:21](#) From climate emergencies to my favorite topic, summer. Summer, as we all know, is here. And Tesla is looking out for your furry friends. Now each year, hundreds of dogs die from heat stroke as a result of their owners leaving them inside a vehicle while running an errand. The company, Tesla, has released a dog mode feature that aims to keep unattended pets inside a vehicle at a comfortable temperature. So how does it work? The dog mode keeps the AC on even if the vehicle is turned off. There is even a message that reads, "My owner will be back soon. Don't worry. The AC is on," for anyone who is concerned if they're walking by. The temperature is also displayed on the screen in the vehicle. Not a bad idea at all. It's also worth noting that the message will update, depending on whether the vehicle's climate control calls for heating or for cooling. So if you're a fan of Tesla, I encourage you to go out and buy a Tesla and keep your pet cool this summer.
- C. Farrell: [04:32](#) One more reason to check out a Tesla.
- Omar Bourne: [04:34](#) There you go.
- C. Farrell: [04:35](#) I will also say from personal experience that I will be super excited when Tesla figures out a way to get my dog happily into the car.
- Omar Bourne: [04:44](#) That's going to be the next feature.

- C. Farrell: [04:44](#) Yeah. That would be a super helpful feature for me. Last but not least, we will talk about one of our other favorite topics, hurricanes.
- Omar Bourne: [04:51](#) It's hurricane season.
- C. Farrell: [04:53](#) What is the most dangerous element of a hurricane? If you guessed high winds or storm surge, you are wrong. The answer is rain. That's right. In the past three years, rain has pushed aside storm surge to emerge as the leading cause of death in hurricanes. According to the National Hurricane Center, about 75% of the 162 fatalities in hurricanes and other tropical cyclones striking the US over the past three years were caused by rain induced flooding, with most victims drowning in or near their vehicles. The fatalities occurred in a series of particularly wet hurricanes that set state and national rainfall records, including Hurricane Harvey in 2017 and Hurricane Florence in 2018. Unlike storm surge, which affects areas near the ocean, torrential rains can cause widespread damage deep inland. Currently, the system for classifying hurricanes relies solely on wind speed. Experts say this emphasis on wind carries over to the public, where there continues to be a lack of appreciation for the risks posed by rain and inland flooding.
- Omar Bourne: [05:56](#) Yeah. That's a very interesting story, Christina, because when you think about hurricanes, you don't necessarily think about rainfall. A lot of people discuss and talk about storm surge. And when you look at Harvey back in 2017, that dropped 60 inches of rain in parts of Texas.
- C. Farrell: [06:13](#) There are many hazards that you have to be aware of. And when you're talking about diverse climates, you're talking about Florida and Texas and New York and lots of other states in between, they have very different climates. They have different topography, so I don't think there's an easy answer. I think storm surge, wind, rain, other hazards come into play. And I think the overall message is hurricanes are no joke. When called to evacuate, you need to evacuate, and you need to prepare well in advance.
- Omar Bourne: [06:42](#) Yep. Prepare for all hazards.
- C. Farrell: [06:43](#) That is our mantra. We will keep saying it.
- Omar Bourne: [06:46](#) That's right.

C. Farrell: [06:47](#) And that is the Situation Report. Still to come, we will be talking with the new commissioner of Emergency Management here in New York City, Deanne Criswell. But first, here is a public service announcement from New York City Emergency Management and The Ad Council.

Speaker 5: [07:01](#) When is the best time to talk to your family about staying in touch during a disaster? When hurricane winds are gusting? When flood waters reach your door, or a blizzard blocks all the roads? Or is the best time perhaps today? During a disaster, you may not be able to stay in touch with your family or friends as easily as you think. Make your emergency plan today. Go to [NYC.gov/readyny](http://NYC.gov/readyny), or call 311. Don't wait, communicate. Brought to you by New York City Emergency Management and the Ad Council.

Speaker 4: [07:33](#) You're listening to "Prep Talk," the Emergency Management Podcast.

Omar Bourne: [07:38](#) You are listening to "Prep Talk," and we are back. On today's episode, we're talking to Deanne Criswell, commissioner here at New York City Emergency Management. Commissioner Criswell, thank you for joining us, and welcome to New York City.

Deanne Criswell: [07:53](#) Thank you.

C. Farrell: [07:54](#) You have a wealth of experience in emergency management. What sparked your interest in the field, and how did you get started?

Deanne Criswell: [08:00](#) Yeah. That's a great question. I worked for the city of Aurora in Colorado for 17 years. I started out as a firefighter there working in the training academy at some times, as well as on the hazardous materials team. And then the position for emergency management opened up, and I worked with my fire chief and convinced him to let me try out for that job. And I just fell in love with it. It was a whole new type of work. It was a new discipline that was growing. I really liked the collaboration that we were able to build among the departments, working directly with individuals to help them in preparing for emergencies, as well as assisting them during and after an emergency had struck. And I also liked the training and exercise that is so important to this field, and really helping us become more ready for disasters.

Omar Bourne: [08:47](#) And you've been the primary federal representative responsible for leading FEMA's response to and recovery from emergencies

and major disasters. How have those experiences shaped your outlook on the field?

- Deanne Criswell: [09:02](#) I have had a great career, and have been able to go all over the place, and incredibly lucky to be able to have served so many Americans in some of their darkest hours. I coordinated FEMA's response to flooding events in North Dakota and West Virginia. I responded to hurricanes in South Carolina, as well as wildfires in Colorado. And I've been able to see the power in bringing the resources and services directly to those most affected, meeting them where they are, giving them assistance where they are and when they need it.
- Deanne Criswell: [09:35](#) And over the past decade, FEMA has been able to innovate the services it offers as well, such as assisting people to register for disaster assistance online on the spot. And I think that is really vital as we continue to try to find new and innovative ways to help people in a coordinated manner that does not add to their anxiety, but it really helps them get the services they need.
- C. Farrell: [09:55](#) In emergency management, we talk about the whole community approach to preparedness. Can you talk a little bit about the importance of building relationships within communities in blue skies times, which is what we refer to the times before and in between emergencies?
- Deanne Criswell: [10:09](#) Yeah. Absolutely. In a city as resource rich as New York City, we have so many opportunities to engage organizations and institutions. And I know that the team at New York City Emergency Management has already built many partnerships across the city's robust private sector, the faith based sector, as well as voluntary organizations, academic institutions, and other sectors. And I can't stress enough how important it is to nurture these partnerships and relationships make them mutually beneficial. And while I'm here, what I want to do is build upon the work that has already been done and strengthen those relationships.
- Deanne Criswell: [10:46](#) I spent about a month here in the City's Emergency Operations Center during the response to Hurricane Sandy, and the one thing I quickly learned is that New York City is really a collection of individual neighborhoods. Now New York City Emergency Management visits these neighborhoods 900 times a year, sharing emergency preparedness materials through our Ready New York program in multiple languages. And we also engage New Yorkers through our Community Emergency Response, or CERT teams, as well as local organizations, through our community planning toolkit. We need all members of the

community to have a role in preparing their communities, as well as helping to lead the recovery after an event.

Omar Bourne: [11:22](#) And I like the fact that you talk about whole community approach. You mentioned CERT. We talked about Ready New York. And I know you've also mentioned wanting to work the private sector. So can you walk our listeners through how you would like to engage the private sector with emergency management here in the city?

Deanne Criswell: [11:41](#) Absolutely. There's been so much work done here recently on really trying to create a more holistic approach to responding to disasters, and a much more deliberate effort to include the private sector in that. The private sector has ... What is the statistic, about 80% of our critical infrastructure?

Omar Bourne: [12:02](#) Yep.

Deanne Criswell: [12:02](#) And so it's really important for us to be engaging with them on a regular, routine basis to, one, understand what their needs are during an event, and how we can help them get back online faster, which means that they can help citizens faster. But many of them also have resources that they want to be able to provide during an incident response as well. They have staff that want to be able to deploy. They have resources that they can deploy. And it's really important to really understand how we can help each other both ways to make a much more efficient response and get citizens the things that they need as quickly and effectively as we can.

Omar Bourne: [12:44](#) I like that.

C. Farrell: [12:45](#) Yeah. I'll say definitely being through a few emergencies here, working with our public/private emergency support function upstairs in the EOC, it's just as important the information that we'll get back from the private sector, we engage the colleges, we engage restaurants, real estate, airlines. And sometimes they have access to information or to resources, like you said. They may have dealt with some type of emergency in another part of the world. So just like we like to share information with them, and bring it out, it's really been helpful as they can bring information back to us, so that's definitely something that we can always expand. There's a pretty large, if not the largest private sector here right in the city.

Deanne Criswell: [13:26](#) Oh, absolutely.

- C. Farrell: [13:27](#) So I think the possibilities are endless.
- Deanne Criswell: [13:28](#) Yeah. And I'm really excited really to start engaging the private sector here within the city. It was exciting for me to see that we have a private sector ESF here, which is something that FEMA has just been in the process of adding into the national response framework. And so I think it's going to be great to build upon what we've already done here at New York City Emergency Management, and start to implement that moving forward.
- Omar Bourne: [13:52](#) Yeah. And for our listeners who may not be familiar with the Emergency Management, ESF is the Emergency Support Function, the Emergency Support Function. You have a wealth of knowledge. So what are you looking forward to as the new commissioner here at Emergency Management?
- Deanne Criswell: [14:09](#) I'm looking forward to a lot of things, but mostly right now I'm excited to really build on all of the work that the team at New York City Emergency Management has already done. There are countless opportunities to increase situational awareness during emergencies by using data more strategically, by analyzing that data, and identifying trends to help improve decision making. And I'm also really looking forward to joining the Big City Emergency Managers group. It's always a great idea to learn from your peers and to see what innovative ideas you can borrow from other jurisdictions, and so we can continue to learn from each other and really help grow the discipline of emergency management nationwide.
- Omar Bourne: [14:49](#) Shout out to Big City Emergency Managers. I just finished up a conference in Boston back in March, and that was the Emerging Leaders Conference. And that's a great opportunity for people in the field to really network, and as you said Commissioner, learn from those in other jurisdictions, see what they're doing, and how we may be able to implement those strategies here in New York City.
- C. Farrell: [15:17](#) Yep. And we said before, Boston, we hosted back last October in New York. And we actually did a podcast with Barb Graff from Seattle, who's the chairperson and one of the emergency managers from Chicago. So we'll look back in our archives and find that, so you can learn a little bit from your peers before you even join them at the next meeting.
- Deanne Criswell: [15:37](#) Absolutely. I'm really looking forward to meeting with all of them.

C. Farrell: [15:40](#) We've talked a little bit about your experience, about what you're looking forward to. But your new to New York, to be here full-time. What's something that you want our listeners to know about you?

Deanne Criswell: [15:50](#) Yeah. I'm coming here with my three year old Golden Retriever, who's named Wilson, named after the volleyball from the movie Castaway. And I really just love spending time outdoors with him, and I'm looking forward to exploring all of the beautiful parks that New York City has, and seeing what they have to offer when I'm not working.

Omar Bourne: [16:09](#) And I'm going to ask the bagel question. And for those who are listening, I asked the question because we went ... Pat Kiernan, from New York 1, actually asked the bagel question in your first interview here in New York City. Have you found the bagel spot as yet?

Deanne Criswell: [16:31](#) I still have not had time to find my own bagel spot. But I have faith that I am going to get great bagels here from the staff, and they're going to direct me in the right direction.

Omar Bourne: [16:40](#) We're not going to steer you wrong, no. And then the question that we like to ask all emergency managers when they come on the show. What keeps you up at night?

Deanne Criswell: [16:52](#) New York City is vulnerable to so many different threats, and so I think what really keeps me up at night is those black swan incidents. That book, The Black Swan, and the theory of The Black Swan is something that I've been really interested in and studied since my time at the Naval post graduate school, which is where I was introduced to that. And it's those events that we just don't think are possible. We don't think about them happening ahead of time, until then they actually happen, and then we have to respond to them. And then have to think about how we would've planned and prepared differently. It's those type of black swan events that are really the ones that ... How do you plan for what you don't know?

Omar Bourne: [17:32](#) Right. That's a very good question. How do you?

Deanne Criswell: [17:37](#) Yeah. I think the biggest part of that is you plan for what you do know. Right?

Omar Bourne: [17:40](#) Right.



- Deanne Criswell: [17:40](#) And you do the risk based planning. And that will lead into those types of events that become new, something that we haven't responded to in the past. And you build off that baseline that you've been doing all along during those blue sky days that you mentioned earlier.
- C. Farrell: [17:56](#) Yeah. One thing I remember from back in my career is that for those of us that are old enough to remember Y2K was the hugest thing ever. Everybody was afraid, everything was going to stop working, even though we didn't have as much technology back then, still people weren't going to receive their paychecks, all that. The City had a big plan. We had an ops center that everybody was in at New Year's Eve, the whole thing. And then the clock turned, and there was no major consequences. But all the City agencies, even ones that may not have been into emergency management back in the late '90s, they all put plans together. Then lo and behold, 9/11 happened. And so to look at citywide plans, really what was pulled out was the Y2K plans because they talked about critical facilities. They talked about other things. And so it wasn't a perfect system, but like you said, people hadn't foreseen something like that happening in that way, and so we were able to take the plans that we had. And we were so much better off than we would've been otherwise.
- Omar Bourne: [18:54](#) Yeah. Well said. When you look at the emergency management field, and how it's evolved to your point with plans, you find more people now taking this up as something that you can study. They're going to school for emergency management. I came from communications, the news world. Really didn't have a grasp on the emergency management field and just how much you can learn. How have you seen the field evolve over the years, and where it's going in the near future?
- Deanne Criswell: [19:32](#) I think when I first started in the fire department in Aurora, Colorado, emergency management at the time, a lot of it was a grant operation, managing the different grants that were coming out from the federal government, and putting together some basic plans, getting a little bit of involvement just to make sure that you were mostly maybe checking a box along the way, just getting some basic awareness out there. But as we have seen that collaboration is the key to success. We talked about the whole community. We talked about all the different partners. And the way to do that is by collaborating better. And it's not about having ownership of something. It's about having that strategic understanding and knowing how to bring the right players to the table.

Deanne Criswell: [20:21](#) And emergency management has really been able to take that to the next level. And that's really become the foundation of what emergency management is. It's that collaboration and that coordination entity. And we're seeing more and more training and education coming out that really helps to teach people how to bring the right players together, and how to understand and accept risk and get comfortable with risk, so they can make better decisions. And so I continue to see that grow.

Deanne Criswell: [20:50](#) And then the other part that I talked about earlier too, is data-driven decision making. There's so much technology out there now, that you can really create better situational awareness, better tools, identify trends, do analysis, so you can make better decisions even if you have limited information. Because oftentimes, you have to make decisions without all of the information. And so the more comfortable you are with risk and understanding the risk, the easier it is for you to make those decisions based on the data that you have. And then you adjust those as needed, as more information comes in.

Omar Bourne: [21:26](#) Well said.

C. Farrell: [21:28](#) All right. Now we are going to transition to the second part of the show. It's called Rapid Response Time. And if you are a first time listener, or a first time guest, it's simple. Omar and I will ask Commissioner Criswell a few questions, and she will give us the first answer that comes to mind.

Speaker 4: [21:43](#) If you don't know, now you know. You're listening to "Prep Talk," the emergency management podcast. It's time for "Prep Talk" Rapid Response.

C. Farrell: [22:00](#) What is one emergency item you cannot live without?

Deanne Criswell: [22:03](#) One emergency item, I'm going to say food and water. That's actually two items.

Omar Bourne: [22:09](#) That's okay.

Deanne Criswell: [22:10](#) Food and water and essential for me. Nobody wants to be around me when I get hangry. I am definitely that Snickers commercial hangry, and I always have a Snicker bar available to me whenever I need one.

Omar Bourne: [22:23](#) I agree. I agree because I am the same way.

C. Farrell: [22:26](#) What are your hobbies?

Deanne Criswell: [22:28](#) I really love to be active and outdoors. I have in the last few years gotten into doing triathlons. And I've actually completed three Ironman Triathlons. One of my goals has been to do the New York City Triathlon, mostly because I want to say that I swam in the Hudson River. It hasn't worked out for me timing, so I'm hopeful that while I'm here, I'll be able to accomplish that one and check that one off my list.

Omar Bourne: [22:56](#) We'll make sure that you can definitely get that one checked off. What is your favorite show or movie?

Deanne Criswell: [22:59](#) Definitely, I am a Survivor geek. I have been watching it since it started in 2000. They just had their 38th season, and I've seen every single one. And it changes so much that it's still interesting me, and I can't wait for the next season to come out.

Omar Bourne: [23:14](#) Very popular.

C. Farrell: [23:14](#) Yeah, I know. I agree. My family, I've gotten my kids into. My husband and I watch it. He actually went to school with one of the winners, the Fireman Tom.

Omar Bourne: [23:22](#) Oh, really? Okay.

C. Farrell: [23:23](#) From 2005, yeah. But I agree that they can keep it fresh. And what I like now is the younger, the kids that were five, six when it started, now they're actually in their 20s going on the show, so it's grown up as a cultural phenomenon. So maybe we'll get a little Survivor pool going in the office.

Deanne Criswell: [23:40](#) I think so. But I could never be on the show because, again, I would get too hangry.

Omar Bourne: [23:43](#) There you go.

C. Farrell: [23:45](#) Hangry people get voted off early.

Deanne Criswell: [23:46](#) Very early.

C. Farrell: [23:47](#) That would not be helpful. Omar?

Omar Bourne: [23:50](#) And then what is currently on your playlist?

Deanne Criswell: [23:53](#) At the top of my playlist right now is Old Town Road. I absolutely love that song with a mix of country and rap, and the controversy that it seems to be creating. But it is catchy, and I find myself singing it all the time.

Omar Bourne: [24:08](#) Lil Nas X.

Deanne Criswell: [24:08](#) Don't ask me to sing it now.

Omar Bourne: [24:10](#) That was going to be my next question. (singing).

C. Farrell: [24:13](#) We've banned you from singing.

Omar Bourne: [24:14](#) I just did.

C. Farrell: [24:14](#) He always tries to sneak in the tunes.

Omar Bourne: [24:18](#) It's karaoke. I love karaoke. But no, that's a great tune.

C. Farrell: [24:22](#) Especially for summer. Summer beach kind of song. And the last question, very brief. Sum up the work you do in one word.

Deanne Criswell: [24:31](#) That would have to be rewarding, without a doubt.

C. Farrell: [24:34](#) Very good. Seems like a great place to end, so we want to thank you. We know this week is busy. You're getting up to speed on everything, meeting everybody. But we, and I'm sure our listeners, want to thank you for taking the time. And we know you'll be back on the podcast soon, so we'll thank you in advance.

Deanne Criswell: [24:49](#) Great. Well, thank you very much for having me today and looking forward to more.

Speaker 1: [24:56](#) 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.