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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.

Allison Pennisi:

Hello everyone. Thank you for listening. I'm Allison Pennisi, and you are our listeners. And as always, we thank you for joining us. We want you to come back as often as you can. So feel free to listen to Prep Talk on your favorite podcast provider. You can also follow us on social media, on our Twitter @nycemergencymgt, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and much more. In this episode, we will be speaking with Katheryn Howard, New York City Emergency Management's director of Planning. She will share the guiding principles of emergency planning and the plan management process. Katheryn, thank you so much for joining us. Let's get started. So can you please share your role with our listeners and how you and your team coordinate planning initiatives and maintain planning documents for our agency and the city as a whole?

Katheryn Howard:

Absolutely. Hi everyone. I'm Katheryn Howard. Thanks so much for having me. I use she/her pronouns and I'm the Director of Planning, at New York City Emergency Management. I could talk passionately about planning, organizing, processes and systems all day. I've basically been doing it in my personal life, and now professional life since I was very young and I'm excited to share with everyone. So New York City Emergency Management is the coordinating agency for emergencies in New York. And that applies not only to responding to emergencies, but also for planning for them as well. So as such, NYCEM leads the city in creating, maintaining and socializing plans for all sorts of hazards, as well as for specific operations and capabilities. So I oversee plan management as well as the hazard planning and preparedness team. The folks in the hazard planning and preparedness team are subject matter experts in specific hazards. So things like coastal storms, extreme heat, flash flooding, winter weather, pandemics, nuclear explosions, radiological incidents, things like that.

They write and maintain documents that are more strategic and high level, providing that big picture view of what the hazards are, what types of impacts could occur and the array of tools, programs, operations, and resources the city has overall available to provide consequence management and to really help people in need. These folks don't plan in a vacuum, but rather they work with everyone across our agency and across dozens of other city agencies to make sure that everything captured in these documents is accurate, actionable, and agreed upon by every organization and agency that has a role and responsibility in executing the response to these emergencies. There are other people across NYCEM that focus on other components of emergency management, things like logistics and transportation infrastructure, human services, health, and medical, things like that. And they really focus on specific capabilities and operations programs and ways that we as a city respond to the consequences of emergencies.

So think of things like sheltering, evacuations, food access, commodity distributions, et cetera. And these folks, they plan, they work with people across our agency, across other agencies, the people really on the ground that are going to be doing this work. And so, they work on these plans and then they also, time of an emergency, will be the ones that oversee or directly execute these plans and these documents. And so, it's really exciting that we have these two separate groups of folks that do planning, because the people that are doing consequence planning, they are focused on all sorts of pieces that

can really be applied to a lot of different hazards. And then, the folks on my team are looking at hazards holistically and being able to say, "Okay, we're going to use evacuation for this hazard. We're going to use food access for these three hazards and be able to make sure that ideally, all of these ways that we respond to emergencies and options that we have at our fingertips to use can really be applied to a lot of different hazards and truly all hazards."

The other area that I oversee, which I think is really the backbone of planning for New York City, is our plan management team. So I like to think of them as the librarians of citywide plans, as well as the NASCAR pit crew of planning. These folks don't actually own any specific documents, but they are responsible for overseeing all of the documents and ensuring that they are easily accessible, maintained, and really look at planning overall from a very high level viewpoint and seeing how the plans speak to each other, interact with each other. If one person's updating a document, how does that have ripple effects in other documents? And making sure that we're as clear with all of our documents as possible. They also create and oversee the implementation of the planning process. And this process is highly detailed, but it really has four main benchmarks and that's initiate, develop, finalize and share.

And as you can imagine with over dozens, maybe 50 people from across our agency, plus other city agencies writing these inter-agency citywide documents, plus up to hundreds of people actually using the documents. It's really critical for all of these plans to be consistent with one another, following the same templates, written in the same tone and voice, containing consistent information. So that anyone picking up a document really understands what the document is for and doesn't get lost in trying to decipher the document so they can really focus on the content. And so, these folks also work with everyone in terms of coaching them, supporting them through the process. That's why they're the NASCAR pit crew, helping people along the process with whatever support they need.

Allison Pennisi:

Thank you for that. And I absolutely love that term, the NASCAR pit crew of planning. So your team leads the revision of these citywide emergency plans and the revisions obviously help better guide the city's response to a range of disasters. And you also touched upon the New York City emergency planning structure, which is designed to restructure, standardize and update the way these inter-agency planning documents are organized. So let's dive into that and tell us more about those efforts.

Katheryn Howard:

Absolutely. This was such an exciting project. It was a bit more recent that we did this overhaul of all our... The way we organize our documents. Our agency has been planning for emergencies since the agency's inception. It's one of the four critical areas of emergency management overall. So we've been doing that for a long time. And then eventually, we ended up with over 200 documents, which that's a lot. That's a lot of documents, there's a lot of phenomenal effort that went into creating these things from scratch. And we just as an agency, kept adding more and more to the list of documents, and eventually we needed to really take a look and assess what do we have? Are they all still useful? Are they all still relevant? How can we put them together in a way that makes sense and is easy for our agency to use and all the other agencies to use?

So what we came up with, and this really speaks to my absolute love of organizing everything. We were fortunate enough to be able to have some consultant support as well. We were able to take a look, analyze all of the 200 plus documents we had and really figure out, how do we categorize them based on capability, based on type? Who is the audience? And we really streamlined how we do things. And so, we have four different levels of documents. There's foundational, strategic, operational, and tactical. Foundational is really those base doctrines that every other document is based off of. And as

you go down this pyramid structure that we have, it gets more and more tactical. So each hierarchy level is geared towards a specific audience. There's certain templates for the different types of documents. And it really, I think helps people at a glance, be able to find what they're looking for and really understand what it is that we have and also where our gaps are too. So we know what we should be planning for in the future.

Allison Pennisi:

Thank you. So we talked about inter-agency plans, city agencies working together on such plans, but we also know that for emergency plans, whether they're for individuals, for organizations, even the government, they can be vastly different, but there are guiding principles at the core of each of them. So what is your advice for those looking to create emergency plans or continuity plans at that, for themselves or for their organizations or even their municipalities?

Katheryn Howard:

Yeah. So I'd say, start with what you know. Figure out what it is, put it down on paper. It could be post-its everywhere. It could be just a bulleted list, start with what you know, and that will really help you figure out what you don't know. And then get the right people together. So in New York City, we never create documents in a vacuum. I could sit down and type out a plan, but that doesn't mean anyone's going to follow it. So really making sure that if there's people that you need, that are going to need to do the work, they need to be part of it. And so, whether that work is an evacuation plan for your personal family in case of a fire and figuring out a meeting place, you could pick a meeting place, but if you don't tell your family, they're not going to meet you there.

And so, the same thing on larger scales when it comes to organizations and other municipalities. So I think it's, start with what, get the right people together. Also know your audience. If you write for everyone, you basically write for no one. So making sure that you're really tailoring what you're writing, to the correct people. And I would say also, document in a way that you know people will actually use. If it's your family and you have small children, maybe some pictures is better than a 10 page document. And I've found that, we've done a lot of work with infographics, interesting tables. Figure out a way that people are going to use it, because that's really the most important thing.

Allison Pennisi:

Thank you. Great advice. Start with what you know. I just want to change gears a little bit here. So as threats and hazards continue to evolve, we have these new normals, like pandemics and climate change. Are there topics or areas of focus that emergency managers will be paying more close attention to? And how do we consider things like cascading impacts and diversity, equity and inclusion when it comes to emergency plans?

Katheryn Howard:

Yes, I'm so happy you mentioned cascading impacts and equity, because I think one of the things I learned the most during the early stages of COVID is that, it's imperative that we start planning for concurrent hazards. And that's actually something that I led our during COVID, the initial response is that, we realized quickly that we had folks that were focusing on minute to minute planning. We had people that were focusing on day to day, week to week. And really thinking about a pandemic of something that we didn't quite know when it was going to end, what things were going to look like. I knew that there was a gap and we needed to start thinking about what happens if this actually doesn't wrap up in a neat bow by the time heat season comes, coastal storm season, winter weather.

So we really started looking at concurrent hazards. So what happens if we have a massive coastal storm at the same time as COVID? And so, we started looking at every single hazard and figuring out how we need to overlay COVID considerations for other emergencies. And I think that's something that is going to be really important, not just for COVID, but in general. I think with climate change and with other hazards and things that we haven't even begun to imagine yet, I think being able to figure out how different hazards play into each other and will impact what operations and response efforts are available or how they need to change is going to be really important. I think the other thing that has always been important, but I think that a lot of folks have fortunately been more attuned to recently, is equity.

Especially the emergency management industry and field of study has been growing in terms of who is in the positions and who's studying to be emergency managers, but I think we can do a lot more. And I think that one of the first things that I was thinking of, is just the fact that we need to normalize talking about things with our staff and with our colleagues. And at different organizations, there's different cultures in terms of what's acceptable to say and what's not. And I think that it's really, really important for people to remember that you don't drop everything from your personal life when you walk in the door, virtually or literally into the door of your office. There's a lot of things that people are dealing with, whether it's with their family or whether it's really just the systems that are in place right now that were built for specific races and specific genders.

And if you don't fit that mold, there's a lot of additional stress and considerations that you have to carry with you all the time. And I think that intersection is really important, both to take care of your own staff and your own people, and to really acknowledge that. And then also, as emergency managers to figure out the ways that we respond to emergencies, to take a really hard look at that and say, are we actually serving the people that are most impacted by this? Do we have the right people in the room when we're creating these plans? Because I know my own lived experience and I can provide information and background context based on that, but I only have my own perspective. And so, to be able to have different perspectives and see what those ripple effects will be based on our actions as emergency managers and how we can really address those and support people.

Allison Pennisi:

Thank you. Those are all very salient points, bringing every perspective to the table to ensure that emergency plans are inclusive. Speaking with Kathryn Howard, Director of Planning at New York City Emergency Management. 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. But before Rapid Response, here is a message from Notify NYC.

Notify NYC:

New Yorkers love to be the first to know. That's why the city of New York has Notify NYC. So you can be the first to know when an emergency happens. If there's a fire in your neighborhood or the weather takes a turn for the worse, stay informed with Notify NYC. Get the free app today for your Apple or Android device. You can also visit [nyc.gov/notifynyc](https://nyc.gov/notifynyc). Call 311, or follow @NotifyNYC on Twitter, because a notified New Yorker is a prepared New Yorker.

Audio 2:

It's time for Prep Talk Rapid Response.

Allison Pennisi:

This transcript was exported on Jun 28, 2022 - view latest version [here](#).

We are back with Rapid Response with Katheryn Howard from New York City Emergency Management. Okay, Katherine, first question. What is one emergency item? You cannot live without?

Katheryn Howard:

I'm going to go with snacks. I am always hungry. Definitely need some snacks.

Allison Pennisi:

Works for me. What is the best professional advice you have ever received?

Katheryn Howard:

To keep showing up. You can't build a network unless you keep showing up and you can't get good at things unless you keep showing up and trying again.

Allison Pennisi:

Love that. What is on your playlist?

Katheryn Howard:

The Strike.

Allison Pennisi:

Good one and last but not least, sum up the work you do in one word.

Katheryn Howard:

Ah, so hard, but I'm going to say, organizing.

Allison Pennisi:

Okay. We will take it. Speaking with Katheryn Howard Director of Planning at New York City Emergency Management. For our listeners looking for resources on how to build emergency plans for your organization, for your municipality, even for yourself, you could visit us at [nyc.gov/emergencymanagement](https://nyc.gov/emergencymanagement), or check your local municipality for more details. We'll talk to you next time.

Audio 1:

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.