

Bushra Mollick: [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: [00:25](#) Hello everyone. Thank you for listening. I'm Omar Bourne.

Allison Pennisi: [00:28](#) 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: [00:38](#) Well Allison, it looks like we've made it to the end. And for our listeners, we're talking about the end of the Atlantic hurricane season. This year, the National Hurricane Center recorded about 15 named storms, eight hurricanes with winds 74 miles or higher of which two of them were major hurricanes. And we categorize major hurricanes as storms with winds of 111 miles per hour or greater.

Allison Pennisi: [01:06](#) That's right, Omar. It looks like we did make it. But the most devastating storms we saw this year was Hurricane Florence. Our listeners may recall that it made landfall back in September in the Carolinas as a category 4 hurricane with winds up to 140 miles an hour. Pretty scary. New York City deployed two Urban Search and Rescue teams known as New York Task Force-1 to assist with the response and recovery efforts in North Carolina, which was absolutely amazing.

Omar Bourne: [01:32](#) That's right, Allison. And New York City Emergency Management sponsors New York Task Force-1, which consists of highly trained NYPD and FDNY personnel. Now the team rescued 128 people and 61 animals during its deployment in support of Hurricane Florence.

Allison Pennisi: [01:52](#) Yup. And here to talk about their heroic work are members of New York Task Force-1. I'm so excited to have this conversation. Please welcome to our show, Captain Tom Traynor of the NYPD Emergency Services Unit. Captain Traynor was a team lead for New York Task Force-1 Team Alpha, which was the first team deployed to North Carolina. We also have Battalion Chief Bill Reddan of the FDNY. He was the team lead for New York Task Force One Team Bravo, the second team to be deployed to North Carolina. And last but not least, we have John Grimm who is assistant commissioner here at New York City Emergency

Management and he actually oversees the New York Task Force 1 team. Welcome to "Prep Talk" everybody.

- Allison Pennisi: [02:29](#) Assistant Commissioner Grimm, I'd like to start with you. So we mentioned New York City Emergency Management is the sponsoring agency for New York Task Force-1. But can you explain to our listeners what that means?
- John Grimm: [02:40](#) Sure. So our team is one of 28 teams part of a national Urban Search and Rescue system. This overall system is managed by FEMA and it's made up of teams just like us from Miami, Los Angeles and Texas, all over the country that form this system and are ready and able to respond to natural disasters or man-made disasters throughout the country at FEMA's direction.
- John Grimm: [03:05](#) And so one of our roles here is to really work directly with FEMA for when the team gets activated, where they're to deploy. But then also, when we're not being activated, not deploying, to ensure that we're buying the same exact equipment that all the other teams are doing and we're also conducting the same exact training. So all 28 teams really are equipped and trained to be able to have the same exact capabilities. And our role really is just to make sure that we are meeting those requirements and working with NYPD and FDNY. So we're doing it jointly.
- Allison Pennisi: [03:36](#) And this is a year-round process. So when you guys are not responding to a major incident, you're training, keeping up with your training and your work.
- John Grimm: [03:47](#) Absolutely. Because you just never know when and where disaster's going to strike. So you just have to always be on the ready. So we're always in a constant state of ensuring the equipment is ready to go, it's properly maintained and it's ready to operate. But then also our personnel, that our personnel are properly trained, that our personnel are, we try to cross train as much as possible so that people are trained in more than one position to give us that flexibility. So really, anytime the call comes, we're ready to get out to the door and do our job.
- Omar Bourne: [04:16](#) You guys do amazing work. Now, New York Task Force-1 Alpha team, the first team was deployed to North Carolina on the anniversary of September 11th. The team consisted of 83 personnel. Commissioner Grimm and Captain Traynor, talk to us about the type of resources and equipment that the team takes on these type of deployment.

- John Grimm: [04:37](#) Sure. So we always take equipment to be able to do collapsed structures so that there is equipment there, you can handle major large-scale collapses. In this instance, that was really not the threat that people were thinking were going to happen. We also deploy with canine teams that can do a live search to help locate people that are trapped. And also we bring a contingency of equipment to do water rescues. I'll turn over to Captain Traynor to talk mainly about that a little more.
- Tom Traynor: [05:07](#) Like the commissioner said, we go out with a lot of equipment. The canine teams, our boats, we go out with three Jon boats. They are actually a flat bottom boats and three inflatable boats, which we use for the swift water. Also as the commissioner said, for collapsed structures, we have tech search equipment that we use in case. So we bring all that equipment along with us even though it was more of a water environment we were going into, but we always had that equipment with those just in case that, it transforms into something else and we just operate in that type of environment then.
- Omar Bourne: [05:44](#) You're always prepared for the unexpected. Now, Chief Reddan, you were part of the second team that deployed and your team deployed two days after Team Alpha on September 13th. Tell us about your team.
- Bill Reddan: [05:57](#) Well first, let's start off in the beginning. September 11th. It's always a solemn day for not only a New York City, but for, I would say for the United States if not the world. September 11th, in that state of solemn, I got a phone call from Assistant Commissioner John Grimm saying that the people down in North Carolina are going to need help and can we put a second team together. The team they wanted to put together is a mission-ready package, which is short team, we call it. It's made up of 18 person and it's a water rescue unit specific. So being a smaller unit, it's swift, nimble and tactical. So we were able to get that together.
- Bill Reddan: [06:43](#) And then secondly, getting that phone call on the 11th, it was really, how would you say, it was therapeutic in a way for me and I would talk for the rest of the team that it gave us something greater to think about than ourselves that day. We went right to work. The 13th morning after a hard day on the 12th, we put all that equipment together. Communications, boats, and we got all the equipment together. The 13th morning at five o'clock, we were rolling out the door on our way to North Carolina.

- Omar Bourne: [07:16](#) And Captain Traynor, I know we hosted a press conference on September 11th when the first team was being deployed and you mentioned something that stood out to me, a conversation that you had with your daughter about why you were going down to North Carolina to help others. Can you tell our listeners a little about that?
- Tom Traynor: [07:39](#) Well, a couple of years ago, my daughter Sarah, she's 17, when I told her I was joining the team and what we're going to be doing with the team, she said, dad, she goes, "People are leaving hurricanes and fleeing the hurricane or tornado. Why are you going in?" I said to her, honey, I said, "Well, you know what, we're trained for it, that's what we do. We're going to go down and help people." And when she heard that, something clicked in her head and she was like, "I got it, dad." She said, "Just be careful."
- Allison Pennisi: [08:09](#) You guys do, like we said before, heroic work. Like this is something that, especially sitting here in Emergency Management working in communications, being able to work with all of you. It's humbling to hear like the experiences that you've had working with Urban Search and Rescue, working in the fire department, the police department, Emergency Management. I would really love to dive into your experiences on the ground in North Carolina. So, Captain Traynor, your team conducted rescues in various locations in Bayboro, Goose Creek Island, Fayetteville. And Chief Reddan, you operated in River Bend And Pollocksville. Can you each share with our listeners about the conditions you saw, the rescues you conducted? Captain Traynor, let's start with you.
- Tom Traynor: [08:51](#) Well, first of all, like Chief Reddan here, we're both task force leaders on a team, so we got to give credit to the guys that actually are out there doing the work. Just to be able to lead this team going out the door of 83 men and women, highly-trained rescue personnel, it's an honor and a privilege to lead the team. But down in Pamlico county where we were assigned to which Bayboro was in, there was a call we got early in the morning at about five o'clock of two guys hanging on a tree.
- Tom Traynor: [09:23](#) The team went out and we actually deployed a second team. There were two guys hanging on a tree overnight. They were there probably for about six hours. It took a little while for the rescue guys to get them off the tree. And not only getting them off the tree, but just operating the boat. The guys in the boat, Lieutenant Todd Smith from the fire department, detective Dennis Sullivan from the police department, those guys were the ones that were on the boat, a part of the team.

- Tom Traynor: [09:53](#) And listening to them of how they took the two guys off the tree, and then when they got them off the tree, we brought them to to our medical personnel. Then they said to the guys, "hey, what about the people in the apartment building down the block?" So we realized that there was people in the building down the block, but to get the boats down there, we had to cut trees out of the way. It's not just driving a boat down in the water because the place was flooded. There's a lot of obstacles, trees, hydrants. So I got to give credit to the guys out there, the boat operators that are doing this work. It's exceptional.
- Omar Bourne: [10:27](#) Wonderful. And Chief Reddan, I know, I also deployed with your team so I know, we were down in River Bend and you were operating and on that first morning, we got the call to head out for some people who were stuck in homes. Can you tell our listeners a little about that?
- Bill Reddan: [10:48](#) That first morning, the hurricane was a full force. They assigned us to River Bend to supplement their 911 calls that you could imagine were through the roof. We immediately went into action. The 18 members of the team, fantastic, unbelievable work. In the midst of that hurricane, put four boats into the water, went out and rescued multiple, not only persons but companion animals.
- Bill Reddan: [11:24](#) Two notable rescues were one, a gentlemen that evacuated his residence, went to a friend of his that was on higher ground and thought he was safe. But as the water started to rise, they both became in harm's way. So the guys went, the guys and gals went and rescued these two gentlemen and I believe three of their dogs. On the way out, one of the gentlemen said, "I guess it was meant to be." And they said, "Meant to be. What are you talking about?" He said, "Well, I have cancer and my medicine is in that flooded home." So the guy said, "Your medicine is there?" "Yeah, I just got like \$10,000 worth of medicine, but if I'm without it, I'm just not going to take it anymore and I'm just going to let nature take its course."
- Bill Reddan: [12:20](#) So the men and women, they turned around and said, not on our watch. They went back there in this flooded condition, six feet of water, swam into this house and believe it or not, they found his medicine floating on a table with red ants all around it but they got the medicine and they brought to safety.
- Bill Reddan: [12:44](#) And then another notable, a Marine Corps captain who happened to be, how would you say, isolated from his duty station because of the flooding, took charge of these people

and brought them to safety, which was just a great way to close it out. Great Americans all working together.

- Omar Bourne: [13:05](#) And you guys do as we continually say in this podcast, just heroic work, amazing work. Can you describe for us the reactions of the people that you rescue?
- Tom Traynor: [13:16](#) Well, the people down there, they were very thankful. They couldn't be happier that we were there. When they saw like New York Task Force-1, when we left Bayboro, they actually said to us, how do we get you guys back down here if this happens again? I said, well, that's a bigger, that's a bigger issue. You got to call your governor and everybody else. They were very happy to have us there and it was a privilege to be there.
- Omar Bourne: [13:42](#) Right.
- Bill Reddan: [13:44](#) I'll go back to the old cliché, a friend in need is a friend indeed. But I got to say, not only of course the people that we rescued were thankful, just like you or I would be thankful for somebody rescuing us and saving our lives, but the people that weren't, how would you say, affected by the storm or of loss, joined right in and volunteered. And the resilience of the North Carolina people, it was a heartwarming.
- Bill Reddan: [14:17](#) One gentlemen had told me, we're experts at turning the lemons into lemonade. I think that is a broad stroke of the North Carolina people.
- Allison Pennisi: [14:26](#) We talk about that about how communities come together during times of disaster. We see that here in New York City also. So it's wonderful to hear from that perspective as well. Commissioner Grimm, while the teams are deployed, you and your staff are hard at work. We say at the heart of emergency management is coordination. We say that especially on this podcast, we like to sort of peel back the curtain and explain to our listeners what it is that Emergency Management does and what type of coordination we do. So can you share with our listeners what you and your team are working on when you have the personnel deployed to places like North Carolina?
- John Grimm: [15:03](#) Absolutely. So as the team goes out there, we're really that back-end support. So we have a team that's back here in New York City that's going to reach out and support the team with whatever they need. So if there seems to be some piece of equipment or some coordination that they need for either travel arrangements, any type of support that they could

possibly need, we're really looking to support them on the back end of that.

John Grimm: [15:29](#) And I think back actually of some of the previous deployments that we had. I know the team was deployed to Haiti following the earthquake in 2010. They were operating and there was aftershocks there. So one of the things that we did at that point was we talked to the leadership that was deployed, found out that everybody is accounted for and everybody's safe and then made sure we communicated that back to NYPD and FDNY so that they will know their personnel are safe and then could communicate that to the families. So the families would know, yes, my loved one, yes, they are in Haiti, they are doing rescue operations but they are safe, they remain safe through some of those aftershocks.

John Grimm: [16:06](#) So that piece of communication back with the agencies is very, very important. And then also, if there's equipment that they need. And I remember during Hurricane Harvey when the team was deployed down to Houston, they needed a specialized saw to be able to cut through some of the roofs to be able to check into the attic spaces. So we had to like just kind of find out anywhere in the nation that had this saw and how fast can we get it down to them. And so we were able to work with a vendor and get it, getting something shipped into a disaster zone can be a little bit challenging. At that point, if they're asking for it, we just have to get it to them and keep them working and make sure that they have everything that they need to do this work.

John Grimm: [16:49](#) So those are some of the things that we're trying to do on the back-end. I have to say, fortunately, on this deployment to Hurricane Florence, really we were just staying in touch with them, asking them if they had any needs. But they seemed to be a pretty well supported and doing pretty well down in North Carolina. So, really, it was just about communicating information back to the agencies.

Omar Bourne: [17:10](#) And the team, as we were saying, was deployed to Hurricane Florence this year. And as you mentioned, Commissioner Grimm, they were also deployed to Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, Maria in 2017, Hurricane Matthew in 2016. I want to point out, you mentioned it with the earthquake in 2010, the team doesn't only deploy to hurricanes. You mentioned the earthquake. What are some different types of emergencies that you may respond to?

John Grimm: [17:40](#) So the team can do natural or man-made emergencies that we'll have to deploy to. You mentioned the team has been deploying since 1995. Really the first deployment the team had was the Oklahoma City bombings. The team deployed for that. As we mentioned, it deployed for the earthquake in Haiti, but also the mudslides in Washington. We have this ability to deploy very large teams, also single resources. I think for the mudslides, we were deploying search and rescue canines, canine teams, and they were able to go and supplement what resources were there and just be that added capability to hopefully make a difference.

John Grimm: [18:24](#) So the team has really been at the door a lot. It seems like it goes out most often on hurricanes. They also did Hurricane Katrina. But really, anything that happens that involves major structural collapse or the threat of major structural collapse, this team will deploy. And again, it's not just this team, but it's really a national system. There's 28 teams in this system that all have that same capability and can do this work.

Omar Bourne: [18:54](#) You guys are making a difference.

Allison Pennisi: [18:55](#) Absolutely. And I know we touched upon this already, we've used words honor and privilege. But just to close it out, Captain Traynor and Chief Reddan, what does it mean to you and your fellow task force members to answer the call?

Tom Traynor: [19:09](#) Well, again, Allison, like you said, it's an honor and a privilege, especially after 9/11 what happened here in New York City, how this whole country came together and how they all came to New York and helped us out, whether it be food, cooking, just there for support. And for us to be able to go out the door and help someone else in other parts of the country, again, it's an honor and a privilege.

Omar Bourne: [19:32](#) Chief Reddan.

Bill Reddan: [19:34](#) I would have to say as a leader of this team, I have confidence. I would use the word confidence, because our members are highly trained and highly motivated. The day that you can take those two qualities and go out the door and put those qualities to work to help a fellow human, in my book, that's a great day.

Omar Bourne: [20:01](#) I'm glad that you mentioned confidence because being down there with you guys, and obviously I was there in more of a press role coordinating public information between the teams and the media, I remember on the first morning we're in the

van, we're headed to River Bend and outside is dark, it's raining, it's windy. For me, being my first time there, you get a little nervous. But, being there with the highly trained FD and NYPD and seeing how calm the team was and knowing that they're going into a mission, they're going to help people, it gave me that confidence and it gave me a calm to know that I was going to be okay.

Omar Bourne: [20:50](#) And so, you guys do spectacular work. You're highly trained and it's an honor to know and to see what you do and what you guys can bring to the table to help your fellow men and women.

Tom Traynor: [21:06](#) Omar, if I could just say something. Yes, we're highly trained and we're glad to go out there and help people. I think assistant commissioner said it, and Allison, you asked him. You're our backbone. Omar, with the press, Assistant Commissioner Grimm back home here. People don't realize that without them we'd be nobody. How do we get out the door? Assistant Commissioner gets the call. He's the one that has to reach out to our commissioners, to the mayor's office. You know what, they're the backbone. So without them and like the commissioner said earlier on, if we need something, we reach back home.

Tom Traynor: [21:40](#) Omar, when you're at the press putting out positive stuff for us. So again, I'd like to thank you guys for what you do back home here for us. Yeah, we're out there, we might get the press with the rescues and everything, but again, there's people back home that's doing to support that we really appreciate it and we thank you for that.

Bill Reddan: [21:56](#) If I can add too, you know, just to speak for the team, the support too for the families back home. You can't be on your top A-game if you've got worries back home. Knowing that, New York City Emergency Management and Assistant Commissioner Grimm, they were concerned about our families, open door policy, give a call to make sure, as with the fire department and the police department. So it was a good confidence, again, the word confidence, knowing that my family is taken care of back home while I'm at the tip of the spear. I think I speak for the team on that.

Omar Bourne: [22:35](#) Wonderful. And again, amazing work that you've done. Just to recap, 128 people, 61 animals that you rescued. Close to 300 welfare checks. Just basically you get the call, you go in to make sure that people have physical contact, that they're in their homes and they're okay and you guys did amazing work and

we're grateful and honored that you were able to go out and help your fellow men and women.

- Omar Bourne: [23:06](#) We're going to transition into our rapid fire Q&A. This is a lighter topic. We basically ask you a few questions and you give us your quickest responses. One word answers are acceptable. So we're going to start with you Captain Traynor. What do you think is the most important emergency preparedness tip?
- Tom Traynor: [23:28](#) Listen to your local village, town emergency manager. When they tell you to leave, leave.
- Omar Bourne: [23:35](#) Commissioner Grimm?
- John Grimm: [23:36](#) I'd say having a communications plan. Knowing how you're going to be able to get in touch with people, how people are going to be able to get in touch with you. And then just reiterating, listening, listening to the communications that are being put out by the local officials.
- Omar Bourne: [23:49](#) Chief Reddan.
- Bill Reddan: [23:50](#) Well, they both took the wind out of my sails because that's what I was going to say. Absolutely. As we soar, when Sandy, we lived through it here, and in North Carolina, people say, yeah, you know, I've been through this before. I'm not going to leave. It's all a bunch of whatever people think it is. And then they find themselves in harm's way. A car ride for higher land at that moment is the way to go.
- Allison Pennisi: [24:21](#) Yeah. Okay, so what is one emergency item you cannot live without? Chief Reddan, we'll start with you.
- Bill Reddan: [24:27](#) I have to say flashlight or duct tape.
- Tom Traynor: [24:33](#) I would have to say a knife because you never know when you're out there you have to cut a Bagel.
- Omar Bourne: [24:39](#) You get hungry. Commissioner Grimm?
- John Grimm: [24:41](#) I was going to say cash because I feel like you can go ahead and buy the flashlight and the knife.
- Omar Bourne: [24:49](#) I love it. Good stuff. What is your favorite movie or TV show? Captain Traynor?
- Tom Traynor: [24:57](#) How It's Made.

Omar Bourne: [24:58](#) Okay. Wonderful. Chief Reddan?

Bill Reddan: [25:00](#) Let's see, TV show.

Tom Traynor: [25:04](#) He likes Blue bloods.

Bill Reddan: [25:07](#) My wife actually likes that. I fall back on Band of Brothers, that series, or Game of Thrones?

Allison Pennisi: [25:14](#) Yes. My kind of guy, chief.

John Grimm: [25:19](#) Game of Thrones gets honorable mention. I'm going to go with Man in the High Castle right now.

Allison Pennisi: [25:24](#) Got It. Okay, what is currently on your playlist? Commissioner Grimm, we'll start with you.

John Grimm: [25:30](#) I'm going to go with Red Hot Chili Peppers.

Omar Bourne: [25:32](#) Can't go wrong.

Tom Traynor: [25:34](#) Bagpipes.

Omar Bourne: [25:36](#) You play the bagpipes.

Tom Traynor: [25:37](#) And I play the bagpipes.

Allison Pennisi: [25:38](#) Chief.

Bill Reddan: [25:40](#) I'm one of those guys that's stuck in the '80s. So, any music.

Allison Pennisi: [25:45](#) I'm all about it, I'm a classic rock person. We'll all talk offline about all that.

Omar Bourne: [25:50](#) And then to bring it home, can you sum up the work that you do with New York Task Force-1 in one word? Captain Traynor?

Tom Traynor: [25:59](#) Honor.

Omar Bourne: [26:01](#) Chief Reddan?

Bill Reddan: [26:02](#) Rewarding.

Omar Bourne: [26:04](#) Wonderful. Commissioner Grimm?

John Grimm: [26:06](#) Privilege.

Omar Bourne: [26:08](#)

All great answers. I love it.

Allison Pennisi: [26:10](#)

All right. Again, special thanks to Captain Traynor, chief Reddan, Assistant Commissioner Grimm for joining us for this special edition of Prep Talk to discuss the Urban Search and Rescue Team New York Task Force-1. For more information on New York Task Force-1, you can follow our agencies on social media or visit our respective websites on NYC.gov.

Allison Pennisi: [26:31](#)

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.