

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 and 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 P.: [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](#) This episode we're going to be talking about continuity of operations. This is designed to help City agencies make sure that they can provide essential services to the public during and after an emergency. So basically it's the city's backup system before and during emergencies to make sure everything is still functioning and can function well.

Allison P.: [00:57](#) Yep, and it's a great and essential thing for us to have here. So here to explain continuity of operations or as we like to say, "COOP", and how the city uses this plan is Tony Marzuillo. He is the Director of Continuity of Operations or COOP here at New York City Emergency Management. Tony, welcome to "Prep Talk."

Tony Marzuillo: [01:17](#) Thank you for having me.

Allison P.: [01:18](#) Okay, so continuity of operations. It was created as a lesson learned from challenges that the city had faced during its citywide blackout in 2003. We ask all the time, Where were you when the lights were out?

Omar Bourne: [01:31](#) I was in Barbados.

Allison P.: [01:31](#) I remember where I was.

Omar Bourne: [01:32](#) I was on vacation in Barbados.

Allison P.: [01:34](#) And I'm sure that, you know, the City turned and said, We need to have a plan in place to make sure that we can provide services regardless of what happens, including a citywide blackout or a major emergency. So can you walk our listeners through how this program works and also how it's evolved?

- Tony Marzuillo: [01:51](#) Sure. Thanks, Allison, I appreciate it. The impetus behind the Continuity of Operations Program for the City was actually initiated by the blackout. We needed to address the city being prepared, agencies being prepared to continue to deliver essential services during times of disruptions, during times of emergencies. The program was established by former Mayor Bloomberg. It requires that agencies develop and standardize their plans, keep it in a central repository. A set of guidance was established, and we actually provided templates to city agencies so that they could customize their plans to tailor them to the needs of their agencies and the services that they provided.
- Tony Marzuillo: [02:32](#) The program continued to grow over time. We currently have 46 agencies that participate. Each has identified their planning teams. Many of them have customized software with our help. The COOP team here launched the intranet portal. We put a set of guidance out there. It's a way to interact with the agencies and then support them. The managers of the program here continue to provide guidance for the agencies, so that they can develop, maintain, and test each plan periodically.
- Omar Bourne: [03:03](#) Now, Tony, as we know, each agency's mission is different. What Department of Sanitation is doing is gonna be different from what we here at Emergency Management is doing, what NYPD, Department of Education is doing. Is COOP the same across all agencies? Break that down for our listeners.
- Tony Marzuillo: [03:25](#) In some regard it is, but we've gotten to the point where we've established more flexibility. Early on, we learned how important it is to be flexible and to provide a suite of tools to make everyone prepared. We're now able to customize and tailor the software to suit the agency's needs. Each agency is different and unique in some way, so we have the ability to do that.
- Tony Marzuillo: [03:50](#) You mention Sanitation as an example. You know, they provide two essential services that they've identified: Snow removal and debris removal. That's critical to the city. Any disruptions to either operation, as you can imagine, would cause significant disruption to the citizens of the city. So Sanitation focused its efforts on these two plans: One to minimize disruption to garbage and recycling pickup, and one to keep the snowplows moving during significant snowfalls and blizzards. The software, we were able to customize to suit those needs and for them to be able to enter records and generate reports and plans based on their staffing needs.
- Tony Marzuillo: [04:32](#) Here at New York City Emergency Management, as another example, our plan focuses on our ability to open City emergency

operations centers no matter what hazards we face, and we work with our partners to keep city services running.

- Allison P.: [04:46](#) I really like this idea of focusing on essential services. You know, you talked about Sanitation. You even talk about what we do here at New York City Emergency Management making sure we can open our emergency operations center, be able to operate and respond, and also support other agencies as well. What are some other examples?
- Tony Marzuillo: [05:05](#) Sure. The Department for the Aging is another example. They've identified two core essential services: One to ensure continuing provision of home delivered meals and to ensure continuing operation of senior centers. Other examples that come to mind are Department of Environmental Protection. They provide sufficient drinking water to the residents of New York City. They treat wastewater and sewage. Transportation is another example of an organization that is essential to the city of New York. They ensure that New York City streets, highways, bridges remain open and safe. DOT also identified the operation of traffic control devices and regulating traffic as another essential service that their staff performs.
- Omar Bourne: [05:55](#) So to bring it all home, you know, you mentioned Department for the Aging and the home delivered meals. If there is a snowstorm that we know is about to hit New York City, what that means, what the COOP operation means for the Department for the Aging is that they're going to deliver extra meals before the blizzard hits, so that those services are still operational, so that people who are at home can still get their food. Correct?
- Tony Marzuillo: [06:26](#) That's correct. The whole focus is to ensure that if there's a disruption to an agency or their organization, that they have contingencies, they're resilient enough to be able to operate no matter what happens.
- Allison P.: [06:40](#) Like we said before, it's a backup plan. So we say this all the time with regular emergency plans for our listeners. We talk about how to be prepared for emergencies, making a plan, practicing your plan. So how are COOP plans tested and practiced? Especially so they can be used in an emergency. Do you have any example of that?
- Tony Marzuillo: [06:59](#) Sure. Typically, plans are tested at least annually. Some agencies have more resources than others, so they, through a series of tabletops or functional exercises, components of each agencies plan or the entire plan may be tested throughout the year. Our

Watch Command is an example. We recently relocated their operation to our backup facility. It was seamless. It's critical for us because we maintain full capability of Watch Command 24/7 every day of the year. Watch Command is always keeping an eye on incidents throughout the city.

- Omar Bourne: [07:42](#) You mentioned the tabletops. For our listeners, imagine we get a group of people, decision-makers in a room, and we walk through different scenarios. If there's gonna be a blizzard, what are the key steps that we're going to take as a city to make sure that the city is operational, to make sure that we're getting the resources out of the people? If there's gonna be a heat emergency, what are we gonna do as a city to make sure we have essential services like cooling centers up and running? So when we talk about tabletops, beforehand, before emergencies, before the season, for example, we get together. We get the key decision-makers, the key players in a room, we sit down, we hash it out what we're gonna do, how we're gonna do it. We practice, we talk about it, so that when the emergency occurs, we're prepared and we're ready to move and put our plans into action.
- Allison P.: [08:35](#) Absolutely. And I think it comes back to what I like to say, is that at the heart of emergency management is coordination. That doesn't stop when an emergency happens. If business gets disrupted, you know, there's a continuity of operations there, and I think it's really great that we have something here that we've been able to bring citywide to other agencies as well.
- Omar Bourne: [08:55](#) It's like the old Boy Scout law: Be prepared. That's what COOP is, it's the Boy Scouts law: Be Prepared. Know what you're going to do beforehand. And moving beyond testings, have any agencies activated their COOP plans? Put them in process? What was the circumstance behind that, and how did it go?
- Tony Marzuillo: [09:19](#) Since the inception of the program, Hurricane Sandy comes to mind as the even that caused the most significant disruption to the agencies and the organizations that participate in COOP. The need to activate plans across New York City was prevalent. Power disruption, storm surge damage, along with transportation and fuel shortages caused many agencies to temporarily relocate staff, replace damaged equipment, and demonstrate their resiliency.
- Omar Bourne: [09:48](#) What do you think is next for the COOP program?
- Tony Marzuillo: [09:51](#) We're focused on working with each agency to streamline, maintain, and test their plans. Making COOP plans accessible for

mobile devices with additional tools to help manage the incident remotely is something that we're working toward delivering next year.

Omar Bourne: [10:05](#) Wonderful. So what would that look like? We were talking about your mobile devices. We're gonna have those accessible on your iPhone or your Android?

Tony Marzuillo: [10:14](#) Yeah.

Omar Bourne: [10:15](#) That's wonderful.

Tony Marzuillo: [10:15](#) That's an example, or a tablet. We realize that plans shouldn't just be documents for reference.

Omar Bourne: [10:24](#) I like that. I like it.

Tony Marzuillo: [10:25](#) We need to really be a little more forward-thinking. We need to interface with other tools and applications that can help us move this along. Some of the vision we have and we discuss constantly is to leverage technology and make sure that we're doing everything we can with the things at our disposal that are prudent and practical things to do.

Omar Bourne: [10:48](#) And it makes sense, 'cause we live in a technological era. Everything is on your mobile device, your iPhone, your Android. So it would make sense to have these important plans easily accessible at the click of a button so that you know what to do and how to do it.

Allison P.: [11:07](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative), and if the technology goes down, like you said, you have a plan that is printed and ready to go. You're able to open it up. A plan will not work unless you actually review it, you test it, you make sure that you do a great analysis of what's working, what needs to be improved. So I think it's great that not only is the Continuity of Operations Program here at New York City Emergency Management helping these city agencies, but we also look inward as well, and we're able to test our own plan to make sure that we're able to function.

Omar Bourne: [11:40](#) Right. Practice is what we like to say ... Practice, practice, practice.

Allison P.: [11:46](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative). It's also how you get to Carnegie Hall.

Omar Bourne: [11:51](#) Oh, my goodness.

Allison P.: [11:53](#) So Tony, is there anything you'd like to add about Continuity of Operations or COOP?

Tony Marzuillo: [11:58](#) You know, Allison, we're always learning and striving to be better prepared for emergencies. The COOP team here is honored, and we view this as a privilege to facilitate such an important program. It's our privilege to work with so many talented and dedicated people. I'm really confident that we're prepared and extremely resilient as a city for any emergency. We look forward to the future of COOP.

Allison P.: [12:20](#) Excellent. For those interested in making their own emergency plans, you can visit our website: NYC.gov/emergencymanagement to learn more.

Omar Bourne: [12:29](#) What I like about just this entire discussion that we've had for our listeners is that the city, we have plans. But not only do we have plans, we have backup plans. That is essential because when there is an emergency, when there's something coming down the pike, we're prepared, we've practiced, we've discussed this, we've put the preparations in place so that we can be resilient. We often talk to our listeners and people that we interact with about having a plan and having a backup plan. We are practicing what we preach. We want to make sure that New Yorkers know that we are ready, willing, and able to function and to continue functioning before, during, and after emergencies.

Allison P.: [13:19](#) Absolutely. That's this edition of "Prep Talk." If you like what you heard, you can listen anytime on line or through your favorite RSS feed. Until next time, stay safe and prepared.