

Speaker 1: [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: [00:28](#) Hello everyone and thank you for listening. I'm Omar Bourne, deputy press secretary here at New York City Emergency Management.

Allison Pennisi: [00:34](#) Hey and I'm Allison Pennisi, director of communications here at New York City Emergency Management. 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. As they say Omar, let's get into the show.

Omar Bourne: [00:49](#) We have a packed show for you today. We're going to be talking about my least favorite season of the year, winter. Allison, what's your favorite season?

Allison Pennisi: [00:57](#) Definitely not winter, either. It's why we get along so well. That's why we're doing all of this together. No, I have to say it's probably fall, but at the same time then it's also Atlantic hurricane season so I mean everything comes and goes. Whether the weather be cold, you know how that whole thing goes.

Omar Bourne: [01:13](#) See I can do fall. I grew up in the Caribbean and Barbados, so anything that's under 70 degrees is winter for me, it's too cold. Definitely not looking forward to this winter.

Allison Pennisi: [01:24](#) Yes, so we're here to talk about the winter season and we have some special guests here today. We have Nancy Silvestri who's press secretary here at New York City Emergency Management. Thank you, Nancy, for joining us.

Nancy Silvestri: [01:34](#) Thanks for having me.

Allison Pennisi: [01:36](#) We also have Mark Benjamin, who is a comedian here in New York City.

Omar Bourne: [01:40](#) Mark worked with us on our new winter weather PSA and he's going to talk to us about that initiative and some of his work here in the city. Mark, welcome to the show.

Mark Benjamin: [01:48](#) Thank you.

Allison Pennisi: [01:50](#) Mark, let's start with you. You're a comedian here in New York City. How did you get started?

Mark Benjamin: [01:55](#) How did I get started? It starts with making friends laugh and then writing stuff down and thinking that you can make other people laugh, which is crazy. That's basically it. Then four, five years ago I started doing some improv around the city. Yes, that's the first time I got out in front of people was with other people.

Omar Bourne: [02:19](#) How was that experience for you?

Mark Benjamin: [02:20](#) Improv is great.

Omar Bourne: [02:21](#) Yes?

Mark Benjamin: [02:22](#) Yes, it's awesome. I highly recommend it to anybody who wants to improve public speaking skills and comfortability in front of other people. It's a very positive environment and it's a team aspect. You're up there with other people creating stuff with them. Then I wanted to try stuff on my own and that's where I started with standup comedy. That just started with doing open mics a few years back. Getting up and bombing miserably for several minutes at a time, and that really makes you feel alive. There's really nothing like it, but for some reason you just want to keep coming back and that's it. You just keep doing it and keep doing it and here we are.

Allison Pennisi: [03:06](#) Nancy, the press team here at New York City Emergency Management, they're always looking for new creative ways to get our preparedness message out to New Yorkers. Can you share a little bit of the strategy behind this project and this particular PSA?

Nancy Silvestri: [03:20](#) Sure, so not a lot of New Yorkers really know who we are and what we do here at New York City Emergency Management and we're always looking for ways to be approachable and friendly and show people not only how to prepare, but to show them how we're here for them and how we can help. We were thinking about winter weather, it's the season we have every year so everyone takes their own actions to prepare for the holiday season. As the weather starts to get colder people go out and buy boots and they buy hats, but we had some life safety tips that we really wanted to make sure people had an awareness of before we went into the winter season.

Nancy Silvestri: [03:54](#) We thought that it would be fun to take a comedic approach this year. We like to partner with people. In the past we've partnered with the New York City Football Club, for example, to help us do seasonable preparedness in the summer and this time we thought it'd be fun to pair with a comedian. We reached out and luckily Mark was available and we spawned a partnership from there that I think worked out really, really well. I think it'll grab a lot of New Yorkers making a topic that can be routine every year, getting ready for winter weather, a little bit more fun.

Omar Bourne: [04:29](#) You mentioned that not a lot of people know about New York City Emergency Management, so Mark be honest, before we reached out to you did you have an idea of who we are?

Mark Benjamin: [04:42](#) I did because-

Omar Bourne: [04:44](#) Oh wow, good.

Mark Benjamin: [04:45](#) During Sandy I have a friend, a very good friend of mine who worked in the mayor's office during Sandy and I remember him interacting. I think he was even at the OEM, was there a command center or something setup where everybody-

Omar Bourne: [05:00](#) The Emergency Operations Center.

Mark Benjamin: [05:02](#) Because I think he talked about being there during those couple of days. That was my insider info as far as what I knew about OEM before this PSA. Then I forgot about OEM and then I'm now reminded about it.

Allison Pennisi: [05:17](#) Now we're back.

Mark Benjamin: [05:19](#) Yes, now we're back.

Omar Bourne: [05:20](#) Here to haunt you.

Allison Pennisi: [05:23](#) Nancy, can you tell our listeners about the different methods the city uses to get messaging tips to New Yorkers? I mean I know we talked about the PSA and there are other creative ways that we're looking to get the message out there. What else have we got?

Nancy Silvestri: [05:35](#) We like to reach New Yorkers every way that they consume information normally. If you like to look at information on your smart phone and you have a lot of apps and you're on social media, we like to reach you right where you are. If you have

Facebook you can follow us on Facebook and you'll get our updates. We give you updates on weather, we give you updates on emergency preparedness tips, and just general goings on with our agency and the city overall. We have a great website, NYC.gov/emergencymanagement if you like to use the web. We have this podcast, which we'll keep introducing lots of different topics so we encourage you guys to come back and listen. We use press conferences, which is one of the ways that a lot of New Yorkers find out about our messaging. During the winter, for example, whenever there's a snow storm you often see the mayor and other City officials talking from a podium. That's one of the ways that we reach a lot of New Yorkers. Any different way that we can reach New Yorkers where they're consuming information.

- Nancy Silvestri: [06:28](#) We partner with a lot of private sector organizations as well. We have a program called the Advance Warning System, which providers like healthcare providers can sign up for and nonprofit organizations, which help us to reach people who might be a little bit more vulnerable to things like winter weather and cold so that we can make sure they're getting out to their clients and the people who might really need assistance in advance of weather emergencies. If that sounds like something you might be interested in you can visit our website to sign up for that as well.
- Omar Bourne: [06:56](#) I like the podcast plug there, Nancy. Now Nancy, you've worked on a number of major emergencies and we've worked on a number of winter emergencies together as well. For our listeners Nancy is my boss, so if I call her Nanc sometimes it's more natural for me to call her Nanc than to call her Nancy. We often use simple tips, wear scarves, hats, check in on neighbors. Can you tell our listeners why messaging is so important before a weather emergency?
- Nancy Silvestri: [07:29](#) Sure, so weather emergencies are some of the most serious things that New Yorkers face. For example, summer heat is one of the most deadly emergencies that we have and more people pass away during the summer from heat than from any other emergency. Hurricanes also are very deadly and so is winter weather. It's really important for us to get information out to New Yorkers in advance of those dangerous conditions so they know what to do to be ready for them. Even more so to help their neighbors and the people around them to be ready for those. Our tips are, as you mentioned Omar, are very simple.
- Nancy Silvestri: [08:01](#) New York is a very complicated place. We have people who speak dozens and dozens of different languages, we have

people who read at varying different levels, so we really try to keep our language as simple as possible so as many people as possible who see our messaging can actually understand it. We try to eliminate a lot of the big words and use phrases that people might be a little bit more familiar with, with the hope that whoever comes across our messaging, whatever channel they're viewing it on or seeing it in, whatever format it is, they understand what it is we're trying to tell them.

- Allison Pennisi: [08:29](#) That's what I love about this PSA is that it's really straight forward. Even though it has the sarcastic comedic approach, it really gets the message across to people. Thankfully for our listeners, we have a clip of the PSA that we're going to play for you right now. Lets take a listen together.
- Mark Benjamin: [08:45](#) Why are we here? Because it's winter. Have you seen all these advisory tips? We know what we're doing. We're New Yorkers right? Here's my take. Wear layers, duh.
- Omar Bourne: [08:57](#) The clip that our listeners just heard, Mark you made fun of us telling people to bundle up and you say, "Wear layers, duh." I love that because it's so New York, so sarcastic. For everyday citizens how important are these tips? I mean they're simple but.
- Mark Benjamin: [09:15](#) Yes sarcasm is my natural mode, so sorry for laying it on thick there. I think it's key because for me it seems like it's fall, it's 50 degrees, 60 degrees for five months for something and then all of a sudden boom, it's 20 degrees.
- Allison Pennisi: [09:33](#) Yes.
- Omar Bourne: [09:33](#) Yes.
- Mark Benjamin: [09:34](#) And there's a foot of snow on the ground. It's weird, it seems like winter just sneaks up on us. That's why I think this stuff, again it's simple, but it's key that people know this ahead of time because you don't have time sometimes to prepare.
- Omar Bourne: [09:50](#) As we've seen already this season, we had days where as you said it was fall, 60 degrees and then two days later it's 20 degree weather, you have to bundle up and people can be caught off guard. Goes back to what Nancy was saying, we don't want people to be caught off-guard.
- Mark Benjamin: [10:08](#) I like the emphasis, by the way, of checking up on our elder neighbors.

Allison Pennisi: [10:12](#) Yes.

Mark Benjamin: [10:13](#) Yes, just think of it as your own parents or grandparents. I mean my parents are getting up there, sorry mom, but it's true. Just think of every older neighbor as one of your own relatives and I think that makes it much easier to approach them, and check up and make sure everything's okay.

Omar Bourne: [10:31](#) Mark, really quickly, what's next for you and where can our listeners view your material?

Mark Benjamin: [10:37](#) Well, I think after this I'm pretty certain I'm going to get a million dollar Netflix deal.

Omar Bourne: [10:43](#) That's that hope.

Mark Benjamin: [10:43](#) I'll have hour specials coming out. Just winter weather material, just two hours of winter. No, so what's next for me? I'm just going to be performing around the city, just keep plugging away. People can find me at MarkBenjamincomedy.com. I'm on Instagram and Twitter @themarkbenjamin, the Mark Benjamin, I don't [inaudible 00:11:01] sounds a little bit more.

Omar Bourne: [11:01](#) The Mark Benjamin.

Allison Pennisi: [11:03](#) It does.

Mark Benjamin: [11:06](#) Yes, I like the Mark Benjamin. That's where they can find me and they can catch me all over the city.

Omar Bourne: [11:12](#) There might be a niche for you in winter weather comedy.

Mark Benjamin: [11:16](#) I think it's my duty now to at least get solid five or ten minutes on the winter weather and try to make that funny.

Allison Pennisi: [11:24](#) For our listeners, you can view the PSA on Taxi TV in New York City taxis, on NYC TV and on social media channels including Facebook and Instagram.

Omar Bourne: [11:33](#) For our New York listeners catch the PSA on WNYE, 91.5FM.

Allison Pennisi: [11:41](#) All right, that's this edition of "Prep Talk." If you like what you heard you can listen anytime online or subscribe to your favorite RSS feed. Until next time, stay safe and prepared.