

VOICE OVER 1 ([00:00](#)):

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'm Omar Bourne.

Allison Pennisi ([00:30](#)):

And 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, and much more.

Omar Bourne ([00:50](#)):

Allison, this episode, we're talking about volunteers. That's right, the New York City Community Emergency Response Team Volunteers also known as CERT.

Allison Pennisi ([01:01](#)):

That's right Omar, CERT Volunteers have been active in their communities, helping their neighbors, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, just like everything else in 2020, the program itself has made some significant adjustments moving to virtual training.

Omar Bourne ([01:16](#)):

September is also National Preparedness Month and our guests will let you know how you and your family can prepare for the next emergency.

Allison Pennisi ([01:26](#)):

So joining us to discuss these changes are Joseph Pupello Director of Volunteer Programs here at New York City Emergency Management and Herman Schaffer Acting Deputy Commissioner for Community Preparedness. Welcome to "Prep Talk."

Herman Schaffer ([01:39](#)):

Hey, good to be back.

Joe Pupello ([01:40](#)):

Hi there.

Omar Bourne ([01:42](#)):

Thank you both for being here, and Herman is good to have you back, as you said. So let's get right into it. The CERT Program started here in New York City in 2003. The volunteers have dealt with numerous emergencies throughout the years. How is this year different from what you have experienced and what measures have been implemented to help volunteers adapt to these times?

Herman Schaffer ([02:05](#)):

CERT Volunteers have supported New York City in many emergency response situations, but we haven't experienced anything like COVID-19 before. We've worked with and continue to work with the Health and Safety team here at Emergency Management to help create guidelines, to better support all of the incoming volunteer requests while also not putting our CERT members in harms way.

Joe Pupello ([02:28](#)):

Yeah, and on top of this, I think what I've seen is that on top of COVID, this is the first time I've seen sort of our volunteers supporting multiple emergencies at the same time. We've had a lot of emergencies since the beginning of this year, and it really shows a growth of the program, the depth of our leadership and our volunteers, and also their commitment to the communities to see them come out like that.

Allison Pennisi ([02:52](#)):

So COVID-19 has not stopped your volunteers from helping their neighbors and those in need. So what are some of the initiatives that the volunteers have worked on during the pandemic?

Joe Pupello ([03:03](#)):

CERT volunteers have been out in the community from day one. They've been helping at local food distribution locations throughout the five boroughs. They've performed traffic management to receive food deliveries. They've unpacked those deliveries out of vehicles off of pallets. They've gone door to door, delivering meals and other important information. All while using our social distancing, staying six feet apart, wearing masks, gloves, whatever other things that they need to keep themselves safe.

Omar Bourne ([03:31](#)):

And that's a great point that you mentioned that even though they're out there still adhering to the social distancing guidelines and protecting themselves, and that's important as you know, in this pandemic. Now I want to switch gears a little bit to training because I know Emergency Management, they host training sessions in person for the volunteers. Obviously we're living in a time of COVID where we maintain social distance as we've been mentioning. So how has the training changed and how have the volunteers adapted to these changes?

Joe Pupello ([04:08](#)):

The CERT Program in New York City has had some changes. Much of the initial training offered has transitioned to virtual training. Our FDNY and NYPD instructors have been great in helping us implement these changes. As we've all had to learn how to present information differently. It's a skill to do that, not in person and not getting an immediate reaction from the volunteers. So both current members and new students have taken to this so well. And we're actually very proud of how quickly they transitioned to this. Especially the students who were in the middle of attending the in person, basic training class, when everything went on hold, it took some time, but we were able to get the training back on track. And now it's virtual and we'll end up seeing 36 students graduate to become full CERT members.

Omar Bourne ([04:56](#)):

I want to take our listeners kind of behind the curtain here, to what these in person trainings are like because they're training and triage and a basic fire safety where they're working with FDNY officers who are literally helping them to put out fires. So we are moving kind of from hands on to virtual. So what

does that look like? How are they teaching fire safety, where you're not having the hands on approach anymore, or the team isn't getting out there and physically directing traffic with cones, etc, what does that look like now virtually?

Herman Schaffer ([05:38](#)):

Prior to going virtual, there were hands on exercises and activity during these training sessions. The plan going forward is to still have the discussion points that were in the presentations virtual, we will then bring together smaller groups of the students in the coming months to do the same exercises, while social distancing, using protective equipment, gloves, masks, stuff like that. And we will still get to have them have hands on time with a fire extinguisher. They will still do a traffic management in the street with NYPD instructing them.

Omar Bourne ([06:19](#)):

And you mentioned the 36 volunteers that are graduating or that have graduated. And so can you talk a little bit about how they felt with the virtual experience and being able to adapt, maybe not having as much hands on as they would've liked, but still going through with the process and finishing the program?

Herman Schaffer ([06:44](#)):

I think what we're finding is that the CERT Program is as strong as ever. I find that the students showed up, they engaged, they learn from the instructors and they were really well engaged with this and very happy to see it continue. People sign up for CERT because they're interested in being a part of their community. Their interest in learning more about emergency preparedness, to learn emergency response and that's what they got from this. We're seeing that not just these 36 who are graduating, but the entire CERT program has gone virtual. People are meeting virtually, people are discussing virtually, they're responding and working together using virtual pro...platforms that we provide to them. And it's just been a really amazing to see how adaptable our volunteers are in how engaged they still remain in their communities with each other. So it's really a testament to the program, but also to being able to try something new when you're faced with adversity.

Allison Pennisi ([07:48](#)):

Those are all really excellent points. I mean, this class of volunteers has, as we like to say, weather the storm, and it is a true testament to their dedication. And obviously this graduation is more meaningful knowing the circumstances over the past few months. As the two individuals who help run this program, how do you feel about this virtual graduation, given the times and the circumstances of what these volunteers have done over the last several months, could you talk about that?

Herman Schaffer ([08:15](#)):

I think this graduation is very meaningful for our volunteers because people are looking for something to celebrate. They're celebrating an accomplishment, they're celebrating a conclusion, they're celebrating being able to continue in a world where we felt very isolated and being connected to their communities and other people in a way. So I think that this graduation holds a lot of weight and really is a very positive thing for those who are part of CERT.

Allison Pennisi ([08:48](#)):

Wonderfully said. Switching gears, September is National Preparedness month, and what a time to become a Community Emergency Response Team volunteer here in New York City. National Preparedness Month is recognized each year to promote family and community disaster and emergency planning now, and throughout the year. Can you talk about this year's theme, and also the weekly themes that we can expect for 2020?

Herman Schaffer ([09:12](#)):

National Preparedness month is one of our biggest times of the year in community preparedness. This year's theme is DISASTERS DON'T WAIT, MAKE YOUR PLAN TODAY. And as part of that, there are four weekly themes that we're focusing on. The first one is MAKE A PLAN, BUILD A KIT, PREPARE FOR DISASTERS and TEACH YOUTH ABOUT PREPAREDNESS. And I think it's really important to note that typically every year we hold large events throughout the five boroughs. We bring people together, we hold trainings and it's really about bringing people together to talk about this really important topic. We can't do that this year. So this year, not only the CERT program, it's going to be our community preparedness program, the "rate of" New York program, they're all going fully virtual and we're engaging people in a different way. We've had to make some pretty significant changes, and we've got a great lineup for this month and you can read about it on our webpage, and we'll be sending out more information for people to engage.

Omar Bourne ([10:14](#)):

And for our listeners, you can log on to NYC.gov/emergencymanagement to find out more information. And Herman, I'm glad that you talked about the weekly themes, because for example, you mentioned making a plan and, and also building a kit. And when you look at building a kit, we talk about having a Go Bag. And this year for obvious reasons that Go Bag may now have to include supplies that it may not have had in past years, for example, hand sanitizer and packing a mask as well, not only for yourself, but making sure that each go back for each family member have those essentials as well. Making a plan is all about adapting as well to the times. And I think that now more than ever a national preparedness month is necessary because not only do we have to make plans, but we have to make plans that are scalable and adaptable to the times in which we're living in.

Herman Schaffer ([11:15](#)):

And Omar, I couldn't, I couldn't agree with you more. I feel like what people need to be able to do is if they had an emergency plan, review that emergency plan and make sure it's appropriate for what you will be doing during an emergency, but also the new needs that have come about because of COVID.

Omar Bourne ([11:34](#)):

When we talk about National Preparedness Month here in New York City, what can New Yorkers look forward to in terms of events for the year? And what key message do you have for individuals about emergency preparedness?

Joe Pupello ([11:48](#)):

As I said before, we have a great lineup here. We have presentations that focus on hurricane preparedness, pet preparedness, older adults, children, both in English and in Spanish. So trying to make sure that people understand exactly what they should be doing to be prepared for our emergency in New York City and preparing their whole family and those they love for an emergency. So specific

presentations for individuals and families. We also have an incredible lineup on how you can engage with your community on preparedness.

Joe Pupello ([12:24](#)):

So we have an open house on our community preparedness programming, so you can understand what does that mean? What does that mean for you? How do you get involved? How do you get organizations involved with community preparedness? We have a session on community mapping. So understanding what you have in your own community, walking through that process, continuity of operations and making sure your organization is prepared how to prepare for multiple emergencies as we've seen, not just COVID, but other ones on top of it. And then training and disability access and functional needs. And all these presentations are available on our webpage. And we really encourage people to engage, to understand what you need to do and get prepared now.

Omar Bourne ([13:06](#)):

Get prepared now because as the theme says, and it reminds us disasters don't wait. So we have to make a plan today.

Allison Pennisi ([13:15](#)):

We are talking to Joe Pupello and Herman Schaffer from New York City Emergency Management. Rapid response is up next, but first here is a message from the New York City Community Emergency Response Team volunteers.

CERT VOLUNTEERS ([13:27](#)):

The most important thing that you got to understand about CERT is we really can't operate without the community.

CERT VOLUNTEERS ([13:33](#)):

CERT members like me are trained in basic response skills by members of the FDNY, NYPD and New York City Emergency Management.

CERT VOLUNTEERS ([13:43](#)):

It is great to be able to learn from them firsthand the same thing they do every single day to keep us safe. Especially here in New York.

CERT VOLUNTEERS ([13:51](#)):

We learn all kinds of valuable skills, floods, fires, being evacuated from your home, any emergency.

CERT VOLUNTEERS ([14:00](#)):

How to make Go Bags, how to complete an emergency plan.

CERT VOLUNTEERS ([14:04](#)):

I have a whole new found awareness of how to stay safe on the subway, which is a very big thing.

CERT VOLUNTEERS ([14:11](#)):

When you're disabled, you have to be able to plan ahead for yourself and others around you.

CERT VOLUNTEERS (14:15):

We trained over a multi weeks in a whole variety of different things, from first aid to crowd control, traffic control is a biggie.

CERT VOLUNTEERS (14:24):

Everyone can contribute. And that's an important part of being a Community Emergency Response Team member.

CERT VOLUNTEERS (14:28):

This is something that's worth my time to volunteer.

CERT VOLUNTEERS (14:34):

As a sort of volunteer. I'm trained to help all New Yorkers, regardless of any ability they have.

CERT VOLUNTEERS (14:39):

The more you know, the more you're able to help your neighbor. So we need you in our community.

CERT VOLUNTEERS (14:45):

New York City, CERT volunteers come from all five boroughs. All of us are working together to make sure that all of our neighborhoods are safe, prepared.

CERT VOLUNTEERS (14:57):

There's very little more rewarding than helping somebody out who's in distress.

CERT VOLUNTEERS (15:01):

Please join us.

CERT VOLUNTEERS (15:02):

Get involved.

CERT VOLUNTEERS (15:03):

Become a volunteer today.

VOICE OVER 2 (15:13):

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.

Allison Pennisi (15:30):

It is rapid response time and if you are a first time listener, it's simple. Omar and I will ask questions and our guests will give the first answer that comes to mind. Okay. What is the one emergency item you cannot live without? Joe, let's start with you.

This transcript was exported on Sep 08, 2020 - view latest version [here](#).

Joe Pupello ([15:46](#)):

Flashlight.

Allison Pennisi ([15:48](#)):

Herman, how about you?

Herman Schaffer ([15:49](#)):

Solar charger.

Omar Bourne ([15:51](#)):

What is your favorite CERT memory? Joe?

Joe Pupello ([15:55](#)):

Probably my first experience with the CERT program at the semi-annual Randall's Island disaster simulation.

Omar Bourne ([16:02](#)):

Yeah, that's a good simulation. I like that answer because you really get to practice all of your skills and that one simulation, fire safety, traffic management, triage. It's really a combination of everything that you've learned over the training. So that's a good answer. Herman?

Herman Schaffer ([16:21](#)):

Working with CERT during our response to the Haitian earthquake, going back in history a little bit I know, but seeing the volunteers coming out there. There were other communities, they were Haitian themselves. They knew the languages. They were able to connect with people there and they really did an amazing job running that center. So I think that was one of those experiences I was most proud of the program and what it stands for and how it's connected to the community.

Allison Pennisi ([16:48](#)):

Great answer. Last but not least. Some of the work you do in one word, Joe?

Joe Pupello ([16:54](#)):

Support, connect.

Allison Pennisi ([16:58](#)):

For our listeners. If you are interested in becoming a New York City Community Emergency Response Team or CERT volunteer, you can visit NYC.gov/cert. And as a reminder, September is National Preparedness month - DISASTERS DON'T WAIT, SO MAKE YOUR PLAN TODAY. Visit NYC.gov/emergencymanagement to learn more.

VOICE OVER 1 ([17:24](#)):

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.

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