

Speaker 1 ([00:04](#)):

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.

Christina Farrell ([00:25](#)):

Hello everyone. Thank you for listening. I'm Christina Farrell.

Allison Pennisi ([00:29](#)):

I'm Allison Pennisi and you are 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.

Christina Farrell ([00:48](#)):

Today we are joined by the new leader of New York City Emergency Management, John Scrivani.

Allison Pennisi ([00:53](#)):

That's right, Christina, John Scrivani returns to New York City Emergency Management as commissioner after departing from the agency in 2011. Since then he's held many emergency management leader positions at various organizations. Most recently as director of safety, security and emergency management for the Virginia Department of Transportation. Commissioner, welcome to the show.

John Scrivani ([01:15](#)):

Thank you. Thank you for having me this morning.

Christina Farrell ([01:17](#)):

So congratulations on your new role and welcome back to New York City. As we have mentioned in the introduction, and as I know, since I had the pleasure of working with you back a few years ago, you're no stranger to the field of emergency management and specifically to New York City Emergency Management. Although I think when you were here the first time around, it was more roundly referred to as OEM. So I know OEM may slip out of your mouth from time to time, which it does often with many people. So why don't you tell us about your previous role here at the agency and then what you are looking forward to as the new commissioner here at Emergency Management?

John Scrivani ([01:56](#)):

Yeah. Thanks Christina. Appreciate the introduction. Yeah, the OEM acronym still slips out of my mouth often and I often find myself reverting to the NYCEM, new way we describe the agency.

John Scrivani ([02:10](#)):

So before I left the agency, 10 years ago, I was the deputy commissioner for operations. That role, I was responsible for NYCEM's 24/7 Field Response, our watch command and the Notify NYC program to do emergency messaging to the public. The role was basically to oversee interagency coordination in the

field at any emergency incident that had multi-agency response. So anytime we had a larger incident, when more than one agency would show up, we would have a presence out there to help them coordinate the response. I was really proud of the operations division at the time, as they were instrumental in putting forward a lot of new processes. For example, we put forward the new daily situation report, the response packet that we would push out to field responders so they'd have additional information about the neighborhoods, the elected officials, and just the general incident that was happening. We were instrumental with the downed tree task force, which is actually still active. We implemented a tow truck task force after a major snow event, just to name a few.

John Scrivani ([03:15](#)):

So what I'm mainly looking forward to is me and my family are really excited to be returning to New York City. I'm really grateful that the mayor has trusted me with this important role. It's really been amazing to reconnect with old friends like yourself and a lot of colleagues, as well as to meet some of the new staff and better understand some of the new initiatives the agency is a part of.

Allison Pennisi ([03:35](#)):

So Commissioner Scrivani, you have responded to a number of disasters, including September 11, Hurricane Sandy, the COVID-19 response, and many more. Although many of these disasters I mentioned have affected so many people, we also know that emergencies start local and affect every community differently. So how have your experiences as an emergency management leader shaped your outlook on the field and what are your goals to helping New York City communities stay prepared and resilient?

John Scrivani ([04:05](#)):

Yeah, thanks for that, Allison. I'd like to say we learned from every disaster. 9/11 taught us the importance of communication and keeping the public informed. The City created multiple outreach programs to empower New Yorkers to be ready for all kinds of different disasters. As an example, I mentioned Notify NYC earlier and the Ready New York program. There have been so much effort to educate the public on how to prepare, respond, and recover from natural and man-made disasters. Education and outreach is still paramount. We prepare and train our responders to support our residents, but we need those residents to be ready New Yorkers. I look forward to seeing that continue and expand. Events like Sandy, and most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic have really demonstrated the power of coordination. We have learned the importance of improving our operations and using new tools to enhance our situational awareness.

John Scrivani ([04:55](#)):

Our agency also works to review, exercise and improve our plans so that we can continue to effectively respond to multiple emergencies happening at the same time.

Christina Farrell ([05:05](#)):

So as many of our listeners may know or learn, you were a first responder on September 11th. Incredibly, this year marks 20 years since that tragic event. I'm sure for most New Yorkers, even though we've been through 20 years, everybody can remember where they were that morning. I know I remember the outfit I put on as I walked to the train and little, weird details that stick with you when something so life-changing really happens. Would you talk to us a little bit about how you feel

Emergency Management has changed because of that event and the lessons that we are still carrying into our work?

John Scrivani ([05:46](#)):

Yeah, thanks Christina. Like yourself, I vividly remember that day. I spent probably 16 hours on the site that day and I can remember almost every moment. But more specifically to your question, what I witnessed in my initial moments at Ground Zero and the following months have guided me to this day. Just an example, the action of our teams, regrouping, debriefing members that were there during the initial response and setting some directions for the next operational period is a lesson I've kept with me today whenever I'm involved in an emergency event. The leadership and professionalism I witnessed from our supervisors to calmly and methodically bring some stability to the chaos that Ground Zero presented is an experience that is hard to teach in a classroom. It's really something that you need to experience firsthand to understand how hard it is to refrain from marching more people into harm's way, without a plan and approaching even the worst incidents using years of experience and knowledge of disaster response.

John Scrivani ([06:50](#)):

I was lucky enough to be a part of the NYPD's Emergency Service Unit at that time, and really, the team prepared for those types of disasters. Luckily for us, our leadership after the initial events pulled us back and made us regroup so that we can approach it much more methodically.

Christina Farrell ([07:08](#)):

Thank you. I think it's hard to overstate the impact that 9/11 had on the City and had on agencies, such as the NYPD, FDNY, Emergency Management, I know we'll be talking more about 9/11 this year, as we think back on that day in the past 20 years. Now that you are back at Emergency Management as our commissioner and ready to lead us into unforeseen emergencies that we know will be coming in the coming months, what do you want our listeners to know about you and about your leadership style?

John Scrivani ([07:39](#)):

Yeah. Thanks, Christina. So I'm hopeful that I've been able to demonstrate calm under pressure, some resourcefulness during times of challenging crisis and professional leadership that I've learned from my mentors and be an example for other future leaders. My style has been adopted from many different people. If you're in this business, you really need to keep your eyes open and learn and find good mentors and try and model some of the behaviors that you have seen that are successful so that, when you're leading a large team, even day to day, not just during emergencies, but when you're leading a large team, you really show calm under pressure because they're going to look to you to make sound decisions. That's what I'm hoping the team is looking to me for.

Allison Pennisi ([08:22](#)):

So as a leader, Commissioner Scrivani, what keeps you up at night?

John Scrivani ([08:26](#)):

Well, right now, what I think keeps me up at night is very timely and newsworthy and it really is cyber events. I think the events that we witnessed in the last few weeks with the pipeline shutdown, and then some of the subsequent news we've heard of these other ransomware attacks against critical

infrastructure and hospitals and other municipalities, it just shows that we still have a vulnerability there. Cyber criminals and extortionists really. We were fortunate, we didn't see very many impacts in New York City from the pipeline shutdown, but where my family is still living in Virginia, there was obviously, very quickly, fuel shortages. Some of the other southern states really saw those impacts of the cyber attack right away. Luckily for us in New York, we have additional redundancies and we did not have that, but we just need to make sure we're vigilant and protecting our cyber infrastructure.

Allison Pennisi ([09:19](#)):

I agree, and it goes back to what we've said on this show many times is that the threat landscape continues to evolve and we are looking to the future to make sure that we are as prepared and as resilient as possible.

Allison Pennisi ([09:33](#)):

Speaking with Commissioner John Scrivani of New York City Emergency Management. It is Rapid Response time and if you are a first-time listener, it's simple, Christina and I 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.

Speaker 1 ([09:53](#)):

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](http://NYC.gov/notifyNYC), call 311 or follow Notify NYC on Twitter because a notified New Yorker is a prepared New Yorker.

Speaker 5 ([10:34](#)):

It's time for 'Prep Talk' Rapid Response.

Christina Farrell ([10:42](#)):

What is one emergency item you can not live without?

John Scrivani ([10:45](#)):

Well, I'm going to cheat on that one a little, and I'm going to say my Go Bag, even though I know my Go Bag does have a lot more than one item in it, but I can't emphasize enough how important it is for people to have a Go Bag in case of an emergency. I know we teach that a lot in a lot of our outreach to the public and even to first responders and their families, but I'm going to say my Go Bag.

Allison Pennisi ([11:09](#)):

Good answer. We will accept that. What are your hobbies?

John Scrivani ([11:13](#)):

So my hobbies are, I enjoy camping and spending time with the family while we're out. I play tennis and pickleball, and I'm not sure a lot of our listeners will know what pickleball is so please go take a look. It's a very fun game. I also spend a lot of time with my children working on some old cars that we have and just teaching them general tinkering on small machines or lawnmowers or the things we have around

here that break. So we're a very hands-on family and, between sports and cars and working on things, we spend a lot of time together doing that.

Christina Farrell ([11:45](#)):

That's terrific. I think everybody has had Zoom fatigue, I would say, during the last year and some months, and we've talked a lot about work-life balance and even in a very demanding career and role like yours, it's really important to be able to get away a little bit and to do things. Those sound like activities that will really grab your attention and the attention to detail. So, very interesting.

John Scrivani ([12:10](#)):

Christina, I do want to interrupt to echo what you just said. It is very challenging, especially during COVID, to have that work-life balance because a lot of people have just been locked in front of the computer, but I want to encourage our listeners, obviously our staff, the other City employees, to make sure that they have some kind of outlet. The nice weather is coming, the restrictions for the pandemic are lifting a little bit and you need to just get out there and do stuff with friends and family to get away from, especially the business we're in. You need to disconnect at times and really just enjoy yourself. So my apologies for interrupting, but I did want to emphasize your point.

Christina Farrell ([12:51](#)):

No. That's quite all right. That's a very important point. We have been known to have an agency barbecue from time to time. Obviously those have not been happening. You probably remember them from back in the day. So it's our hope as the summer goes and the staff return to work that maybe we can find a way to, in a safe environment, break bread and have a barbecue with staff. I know you've been living in the South, you've probably been hearing some country music, although there's a fair amount of country music up here in New York now, but what is on your playlist?

John Scrivani ([13:24](#)):

You'd be interested to understand that I don't actually listen to a lot of music. I have become a big podcast guy. Most of those podcasts are sports-related. Really some sports and humor related podcasts where they blend it together. But if I do find myself listening to music, because I did grow up in New York City, it is pretty much all old-school rap at this point. I've been listening to that for 40 years now, since I'm a kid, my brother and I have quite the collection and we have some fun with that. When one of us is driving long distances, we will connect and talk old school rap and play some music in the background. But yeah, if I do listen to music, that's usually what it is.

Allison Pennisi ([14:07](#)):

That's good to know, old school rap. I would not have pegged that but I appreciate that answer.

John Scrivani ([14:12](#)):

Yeah. Between Run DMC up to Public Enemy and Eric B. & Rakim, I pretty much know all those songs by heart at this point. It's just, where I grew up in the city, that's what we listened to and that's what I go to.

Allison Pennisi ([14:29](#)):

That works. Okay. Commissioner Scrivani, last but not least, sum up the work you do in one word.

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John Scrivani ([14:35](#)):

That's an interesting question. For me, I would say "satisfying." I find the things I do, it really comes down to helping people. To me, that part of the work is really satisfying to me is being able to make some calm from chaos. So I'll go with satisfying.

Allison Pennisi ([14:59](#)):

Making calm from chaos. Speaking with Commissioner John Scrivani of New York City Emergency Management, we look forward to your leadership.

Christina Farrell ([15:07](#)):

Yeah. Thank you. As I mentioned, when you were announced as our new commissioner, I think a lot of the team that has been here over the last couple of decades now almost, was very happy that you were coming back into the fold. So we wish you and us, I guess, luck. We thank you for taking the time to speak with us and we'll see how 2021 continues to unfold.

John Scrivani ([15:31](#)):

All right. Well, thanks, Alison and Christina, I really appreciate the time. You've given me the ability to speak with your audience. I really do look forward to working with the team. I mean, it's amazing to come back to a team you once worked on and with. My history with the agency goes back well before I actually worked for the agency and the team has just been super supportive. They are, some of the new folks we have, are just amazingly smart. Some of the projects, I can't wait to see them completed just so we can put forward even a better product to the citizens of the city and really help everyone, not just recover from the pandemic, but to be able to recover from any event or incident that comes our way. So thank you very much for giving me this opportunity.

Speaker 1 ([16:23](#)):

That's this episode of 'Prep Talk.' If you like what you heard, you can listen to any time online or through your favorite RSS feed. Until next time, stay safe and prepared.