

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.

Allison Pennisi ([00:24](#)):

Hello, everyone. Thank you for listening. 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, LinkedIn, and much more. In this special episode of Prep Talk, we will be discussing hurricane season in New York City. Although New York City is most at risk for hurricanes beginning in August, there are a lot of changes and possible challenges that New Yorkers in particular may face. Namely, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, or NOAA, is predicting an above normal season with a likely range of 13 to 20 named storms. And what's more? New York City has announced that its hurricane evacuation zones are changing for the 2021 season. Here to discuss the changes to New York City's hurricane evacuation zones and how New Yorkers can be prepared for coastal storms and hurricanes is Joshua Friedman, Executive Director of Geographic Information Systems at New York City Emergency Management. Welcome, Josh.

Joshua Friedman ([01:31](#)):

Thank you for having me. Great to be here.

Allison Pennisi ([01:34](#)):

Okay. So Josh, you are executive director of Geographic Information Systems at New York City Emergency Management. Can you explain to our listeners what your role is and your subject matter expertise on hurricane evacuation zones here in New York City?

Joshua Friedman ([01:48](#)):

Sure. Well, for GIS overall, we deal with geospatial data. So that's anything piece of information that has a coordinate to place it on the earth somewhere. Most listeners, the most common thing that we experience these days to interact with the GIS would be something like Google Maps. Right? So you have an interface where you can look and you get information on the streets and the buildings that are there, maybe the local pizza place that you want to go to. And so we do similar work. When we're doing things like preparing for hurricane season now, we might be mapping out different critical facilities in the city to make sure we know what might be at risk, so we can continue to provide services to New Yorkers in the event of a storm.

Joshua Friedman ([02:28](#)):

And some of the data we deal with that we'll talk about today has to do with hurricanes and specifically storm surge from hurricanes and what parts of the city might be threatened by different types of events. So our GIS team works with that data. And as we'll talk about today, we eventually turn that into hurricane evacuation zones that we push out to the public and ask folks to learn their zone, just in case we do experience a hurricane or coastal storm.

Allison Pennisi ([02:54](#)):

I mentioned earlier in the introduction that Atlantic hurricane season is now under way. And regardless of whether you would live in New York City, you should be prepared for coastal storms and hurricanes. But specifically, New York City is going to face some additional changes for this year. So can you explain to our listeners what hurricane evacuation zones are and why they are changing for New York City specifically?

Joshua Friedman ([03:16](#)):

Yes, absolutely. So hurricane evacuation zones are areas of New York City that could be directly impacted by storm surge during a hurricane. So if you think about that in the most basic terms, that means what areas of the city where safety of New Yorkers could be at risk because their area might be underwater during a storm, right? So we use the latest models and the latest data from the National Weather Service. We add in our local experience and knowledge and data, and to do our best to determine which areas of the city should be in which hurricane evacuation zone. Every storm is going to be different. New York City was threatened by a hurricane. We would look to evacuate the zone or zones that might experience flooding from that particular storm.

Joshua Friedman ([04:02](#)):

Now, I do want to flag one important point. To clarify, a lot of our listeners may have heard of the term flood zones before. Flood zones are different than our hurricane evacuation zones in New York City, and the term usually refers to FEMA's Flood Risk Maps that are used to set insurance rates. So we'd like to remind folks, these things sound similar. They both have to do with water, but they are two different things for two different purposes. And think of the short version, if you hear flood zones or flood insurance maps, those are for insurance purposes. Hurricane evacuation zones are always for life safety. We did the last round of updates of these zones in 2013, and this was after hurricane Sandy.

Joshua Friedman ([04:47](#)):

There were bigger changes last time. If folks remember, we used to have A, B and C zones. We switched to one through six last time. This time, the zones will look similar overall. We still have one through six. There are still roughly three million New Yorkers who live in an evacuation zone, but there have been some changes. The reason we're doing this now is primarily because the National Hurricane Center released new storm surge model data for our area compared to the past. As the computing power gets better and our knowledge about these storm systems gets better, the data is more precise and it should be better at predicting how surge will impact different areas of the city. And we also have better local data, specifically topographic or elevation data, which again, will help us determine in a smarter way where the water might go during a storm.

Allison Pennisi ([05:41](#)):

Thank you for that. And thank you for pointing out to our listeners that flood zones and hurricane evacuation zones are different. Flood zones are for insurance rates where hurricane evacuation zones are for life safety. So you mentioned that there are going to be roughly three million New Yorkers who are in hurricane evacuation zones, but how many people are changing zones for the 2021 season in New York City? And what should they do to be prepared?

Joshua Friedman ([06:03](#)):

Well, we expect to see about one million New Yorkers who may change zones, right? And your number could go up, could go down. About one million of us will see a change in zones. So it's very important to check and see if your zone may have changed. And regardless of whether or not you live in an evacuation zone, all New Yorkers should do their best to be prepared. Hazards from a hurricane are not just limited to storm surge, even though that's what we focus on for evacuation zones. And it's never too early to make a plan, gather supplies, stay informed. As you mentioned, Allison, earlier, New York City is most at risk from hurricane starting August through October, but we have experienced coastal storms and hurricanes throughout the season. Sandy is a perfect example, this was in late October. And the Atlantic hurricane season does run through November. And also, I would encourage listeners to remember not only for yourself, but you can help family members, neighbors, friends learn their zones and encourage them to make a plan as well.

Allison Pennisi ([07:02](#)):

Absolutely. And I think it's important for our listeners. Although we are discussing changes to New York City specifically and hurricane evacuation zones, if you live in another part of the country that is affected by coastal storms and hurricanes, it is of the utmost importance to be prepared and have a plan. Take time to make an emergency plan with your family and your emergency support network. Make sure you include your kids and pets and service animals in those plans. Gather supplies that best suit your needs, whether you have to stay at home during a storm or you have to evacuate. But also make sure that you stay informed, like Josh mentioned. In New York City, Notify NYC is the City's official emergency communications program. City officials also will make announcements of changes to hurricane evacuation zones if anybody is ordered to evacuate. But it's also important to listen to your local municipality as well. So thank you for that, Josh. Where can people go to find out more information and to find their hurricane evacuation zone and whether it has changed?

Joshua Friedman ([08:00](#)):

Sure. Folks can visit [NYC.gov/knowyourzone](https://nyc.gov/knowyourzone). Or you can call 311, if you're in the city. So again, that's [NYC.gov/knowyourzone](https://nyc.gov/knowyourzone), and that will help you find out your hurricane evacuation zone, give you planning tips and other information that is very valuable. And a reminder, these resources are there all year-round, so we can see hurricane season coming. But don't wait until you see something on the weather channel. Now is a good time to look and could be prepared while it's a little quieter. And never too early to be safe.

Allison Pennisi ([08:33](#)):

So Josh, say I live in a hurricane evacuation zone. If I am ordered to evacuate, where do I go?

Joshua Friedman ([08:40](#)):

Well, the City strongly recommends that evacuees stay with friends or family who live outside of evacuation zones, if you can. Remember to check and see if they have symptoms of COVID-19 or have people in their home at higher risk for serious illness. If they do have symptoms or people at higher risk in their home, make other arrangements to stay at another location, such as a hotel or an evacuation center. For those who have no other shelter, the City will open evacuation centers throughout the five boroughs if we do order an evacuation. A reminder, if you are going, try and pack lightly and remember to bring a Go Bag, hand sanitizer, a sleeping bag or bedding materials, face coverings.

Joshua Friedman ([09:22](#)):

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If you do use medication, bring at least a week supply of any medication or any medical supplies or equipment that you need to use regularly, in addition to basic, such as toiletries evacuation centers can change over time. So just as we want folks to go find out what zone they were in, the hurricane evacuation zone finder will also tell New Yorkers where all of the evacuation centers are located and people can get directions to the closest centers nearest their home. So again, if you go to [NYC.gov/knowyourzone](https://www.nyc.gov/knowyourzone), that can direct you to the zone finder, which will help you locate both zones and nearby evacuation centers.

Allison Pennisi ([10:04](#)):

Thank you. And for our listeners, evacuation centers in New York City have accessibility features. Although they may be subject to change, you can also visit the website as well for that information. And all evacuees are accepted and will not be asked about immigration status. For those who have pets or service animals, if you cannot shelter your pet or service animal at a kennel or outside of the evacuation area with friends or family, please know that pets and service animals are allowed at all New York City evacuation centers, but it's important to bring supplies for them. As Josh mentioned, you would bring supplies for yourself, it's important to bring them for your pet or service animal as well. So thank you for that. Thank you, Josh, for joining us for this very special episode. And for our listeners, take the time to prepare now. For our listeners in New York City, visit [NYC.gov/knowyourzone](https://www.nyc.gov/knowyourzone) or call 311 for tips and information. And if you live outside of New York City, be sure to check out your local emergency management agency for tips and information. Stay safe and prepared, everyone.

Speaker 1 ([11:06](#)):

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.