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NEW YORK CITY EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT COMMISSIONER DEANNE CRISWELL ON HER FIRST FOUR MONTHS: GETTING ACQUAINTED AND LOOKING AHEAD

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About Christian Regenhard Christian Michael Otto Regenhard was born on August 25, 1973. He was raised in Co-op City, Bronx, New York. After graduating from the Bronx High School of Science, he served five years in the United States Marine Corps, leaving as a decorated Recon Sergeant. He traveled extensively, often to remote areas of Central and South America, to pursue his love of rock climbing and diverse cultures. After studying language, art and writing at San Francisco State University, he was hired by the Fire Department of New York (FDNY), graduating from probationary school in July 2001. He was assigned to Ladder 131 when he was killed in the collapse of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 at age 28.

About the Center The Christian Regenhard Center for Emergency Response Studies (RaCERS) is an applied research center focused on the development of a mix of grounded theory and traditional empirical analysis in the areas of emergency response, coordination of first responders, and dynamics of large-scale incident management and response. The Center is unique in its devotion to first responder-defined and actionable research on policy aspects of emergency response and homeland security from a perspective inclusive of police, fire, and emergency medical services. Tax deductible donations can be made care of the John Jay College Foundation, 524 West 59 Street, New York, NY 10019.

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One of the unique aspects of John Jay is its student body. Our students represent a diverse mix reflecting New York, but also the nation and the world. Our in-service students include many mid-career emergency responders from virtually every local, state, and federal law enforcement, security, and emergency response organization. As such, we have a unique and long-standing commitment to educating current and future leaders in the emergency response field. John Jay lost 67 of its alumni, faculty, and students on 9/11. As such, we are uniquely dedicated to enhanced responder safety and effectiveness.

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GETTING ACQUAINTED AND LOOKING AHEAD

Thank you very much. I'm really excited to be here today. It's been just over a hundred days I think it is. I was just talking to a couple members of my staff here today with me and Andrew D'Amora who is my First Deputy Commissioner, and alumni from John Jay as well.

As well as Nancy Silvestri who helps me with all my communications outreach. We were just talking about my first hundred days and kind of what that by the numbers looks like. As was just mentioned, I was welcomed first by a spectacular 4th of July celebration followed by an immediate blackout on my fifth day on the job. Andy, my deputy, pushed me in front of the crowd and had me out there and start representing the Office of Emergency Management or the Department of Emergency Management as it is now known.

Today, we're just going to talk a little bit about my journey to here and how I got to emergency management and a little bit about my vision for New York City Emergency Management moving forward. Just a little bit about me and a little bit more about my background in emergency management.



My Path to Emergency Management: What I've Learned Along the Way

I do have just over 27 years in public service and that includes at the city level where I worked in Aurora, Colorado as well as in the military. I was a member of the Colorado International Guard, retired after 21 years of service with them where I was both a firefighter, as well as a senior adviser at the end of my career there.

Then I moved into the federal government and I had seven years with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, FEMA. I did a short stint after FEMA had me on the road almost the entire time, the entire seven years that I was with them. I did a short, little stint in the private sector where I was consulting back to emergency management both at the federal level to FEMA as well to state and local emergency management agencies.

Then I got a phone call one day that said, "Would you be interested in being the commissioner of emergency management for New York City?" Then I didn't even hesitate and I said, "Well, yeah, absolutely." It was great and it went really fast.

I came up here and interviewed with several different people to include Mayor de Blasio. Three weeks from that first phone call that said, "Would you be interested in this," the mayor made me the job offer of the commissioner of emergency management. Then I moved here three weeks later, so it's been quite a summer for me, but it's been an amazing summer for me.

A little bit more about my career at south. I started in the National Guard actually is where I started my public service career in 1992 and I wanted to go back to school. I wanted to get a degree in something and I didn't really know what at the time. And so, when I joined the National Guard, I said I wanted to do something nontraditional.

At the time, they had firefighting and bomb loading. And so, I went and I interviewed with both of them. The bomb loaders were bored out of their minds and the firefighters were playing basketball in the parking lot and I said, "Oh I think that looks like a really good career. I think I'll give that a shot."

And so from there, I went to basic training in San Antonio, Texas. Then I went to fire school and their fire training, which was about two months long and I just fell in love with the field of firefighting. And so, from there I came back and I applied for a city position. I got hired with the City of Aurora in 1994. I was their sixth female hired into the fire department, so it was relatively new bringing women into the field of firefighting at that time.

It was an interesting experience for me to get started. I went in and I took a test and I was in a room with about a thousand different people sitting at the table and they were telling me that this was their 10th year of taking the firefighting exam or this was their third year of taking the exam. I mean, it was just a long time. People have been trying forever and I almost got up and left. I just decided to stay and took the test, took the written test, took that interview boards, took the physical agility test and out of those thousand people, I came up number 11 on the list.

And so, it was just by chance that I've decided to stay that day and it has changed the course of my professional career from then on. While I was with the fire department later in my career, the emergency management position came open and I decided it was time to kind of make a change. I was looking for something that would challenge me more intellectually than the firefighting side while it was fun and it was extremely exciting. I was just looking for a little bit of a different level of critical thinking and problem solving.

And so, I went to my fire chief and at the time, I was a captain on the fire department by that point. At the time, it was a lieutenant's position in the fire service and he said that I would have

to take a demotion if I wanted the job. I wasn't really ready to take a demotion. He said, "Well, write me some justification of why it should be elevated." And so, I did. Again, took a chance, took a risk, wrote a justification and he elevated the position. Again, changed the path of the rest of my career from that point on.

When I took the position, emergency management was really a grant management agency by that point. It had gotten its roots in the civil defense era with the "duck and cover" drills. Then with the advent of the Office of Domestic Preparedness and there were a lot of grants that came out, it really turned into this grant management agency. And so, we were able to take it to another level and elevated up.

Then from there, I went on to FEMA. I started out as a federal coordinating officer, moved into starting the FEMA Corps Program. I'll talk a little bit more about both of those as I go on. Then I went on to lead one of our National Incident Management Assistance Teams, which is where I finished my career with FEMA where I deployed to disasters across the country for about three years. Then decided to take the break into the private sector.

NYC Emergency Management

A little bit then about New York City Emergency Management and its histories. New York City, and I learned a lot preparing for this presentation. Again, I've only been here about a hundred days so this was great. New York City Emergency Management got its origins in the police department. Again, as I mentioned when I started with Aurora, emergency management was really born out of the civil defense days and so that's why you would find it in a lot of police departments or within fire departments across the nation.

By the mid-1990s, the city began to recognize that there was definitely the need for a larger role in emergency management. In 1996, it was actually established as a mayoral office, so it was a separate stand-alone office pulled away from the police department to start doing all of the planning and preparedness measures for that type of support for major disasters. Changing moment then obviously came in 2001.

In November 2001, New York City Emergency Management was actually granted departmental status through a public referendum in New York City. The New York City charter was then changed and it firmly established New York City Emergency Management to roll from then moving forward. Then it changed from an Office of Emergency Management to which you will hear many people still refer to us as OEM into a department level status, which is why now you'll hear many of us say New York City Emergency Management often referred to as NYCEM. I'm not sure all of us really like the NYCEM piece of it, but you can't pick and choose how you say an acronym once you developed one, but it is the New York City Emergency Management Department now.

And so with that came all of the things that a department level agency gets. We got our own IT department, our own human resources department and all of the support that goes with that. The other interesting thing that I think through that evolution within New York City Emergency Management is when it was pulled from the police department and became a mayoral office. It

had one full-time person, I think maybe two. I can't remember exactly, but the rest were details from other agencies, primarily police and fire, but there were also some people and we still today have some people detailed from the Department of Environmental Protection, the Department of Buildings and I think a few others.

So while we still have several people detailed, but as the department grew and as our mission grew and evolved over time, we were able to leverage our own independent budget line so we could get funding to support it. A lot of our resources are still funded through grants, but again, as we continue to evolve and advance the role of emergency management within the city as well as across the nation, we gain additional city lines so if those grants ever dry up, we would be able to continue our operations moving forward.

EM: Leading a Whole of Government Approach

The mission that we have at New York City Emergency Management is to lead the city's efforts and lead is a really important and keyword here. To lead the city's efforts, to plan and prepare, respond and recover from emergencies and mitigate future risk. Across the nation, what emergency management does is we coordinate multi-agency responses.

A first responder agency is the police department. They have their processes and they know exactly what they're going to do and they do it exceptionally well. The fire department, they respond. They put out fires and then they do it exceptionally well and then they go back. Then there's always this piece though about trying to bring what happens after that and when we have to bring all of the different agencies together. That's where emergency management comes in, not just here in New York City, but across the nation and internationally as well. Emergency management coordinates all of those activities.

More and more as the discipline of emergency management continues to evolve and mature, we don't just coordinate those events any longer. We actually lead those events and we lead the coordination of those events to make sure that we have an effective response. We start recovery and taking care of the people that had been impacted by that response or by that event. It doesn't have to be a large event.

One five-alarm fire is traumatic for the people that are in that building just as a Sandy, Hurricane Sandy like event is traumatic across the City. Even that one fire is traumatic for those people and we still have to make sure we're bringing the right resources together to take care of anybody that has been impacted to help them on their road to recovery.

With that, some of the things that we do and leading those efforts is the first is, planning and preparing. The thing that I like to talk about here is that planning is also one of those pieces of our core function that's evolving. Where we have a tendency not just New York City, but across the nation have a tendency to write a lot of plans and have very scripted responses to what we're going to do. It's really more about leading that planning process.

That's the critical point in what we do in emergency management is leading the planning process that we have all of the stakeholders come together, that we engage them in that process and that we're listening and talking to each other about our strengths, about our weaknesses and

understanding what those capabilities are ahead of an event instead of just saying, "Hey, I want you to write chapter 6 of this plan." It's really not about the plan at the end of the day. I can never remember which military general said that, but there was one of them. It's not about the plan at the end of the day, it's about the process of getting there and really understanding.

If you do that part right, you don't never actually have to pull the plan off the shelf. You will know you will have made those connections. You will understand what the capabilities are, what the weaknesses are which is equally as important and what you do to mitigate those so you can effectively respond.

Once we do the planning and the preparation part of emergency management, then we also have a responsibility to respond to those events. At New York City Emergency Management, we do that in several ways. First, we have a 24/7 watch command where we have people that are, one, monitoring all of the different interagency radios or activities that are going on. We have staff that are watching and listening to the fire department radios, to the police department radios, we're coordinating with Department of Transportation and to understand road traffic conditions. We're monitoring that 24/7.

Then we have trigger setup where as things escalate, then we will send out responders to go provide our eyes and ears on the ground and begin that coordination process if needed. Those responders we call them Citywide Interagency Coordinators. I've been out hundred days, I got to look to my staff over here to keep me on this. Citywide Interagency Coordinators, and these are almost exclusively details from the police and fire department. They have come in and brought their expertise with responding to disasters, but we give them trainings so we help elevate them to think differently. They start thinking about the consequence management side of that event and not just the mitigation and the stabilization of that event.

And so, they are the start of our response. If the incident escalates even more, then there's a couple of things that we can do. We have also Emergency Support Function coordinators. If you're familiar with the National Response Framework, there's 15 emergency support functions. ESFs, ESF 14 was just recently added back in with this recent rewrite this year. And so, we have an equivalent Emergency Support Function coordinator on our staff. We have nine different Emergency Support Functions. I can't recite them to you off the top of my head right now.

If the incident escalates and then the CIC, the Citywide Interagency Coordinator can request one of these ESF coordinators to come out. One of the most frequent ones is our human services coordinators. When we have like the five-alarm fighter and we have to start taking care of individuals that were impacted, they're going to be vacated from their homes. They will come out and they will set up a service center or a reception center and they will help bring in the right resources to make sure their needs are taken, finding them temporary sheltering and finding them longer term sheltering and helping them get back into their homes if they need to get something out where it's been vacated and so that's the first level of escalation.

Then if it becomes a significant event, we'll escalate that even more. We can do that in a number of ways through our emergency operations center. We have three different types of activation

there. We can activate just our situation room where it's going to bring in our senior leadership as well as some of the senior leadership of the key agencies that might be involved.

We can also do a partial activation of our emergency operation center at ERC where we're bringing in more of our interagency partners, city partners that are not part of the city like the American Red Cross. We can bring them in and start to coordinate. That would be what we did during the heatwave in July.

Then we can do a full activation where we have all hands on deck. All of the New York City Emergency Management staff are inside the ERC as well as all of the ESF representatives and as well as other partners are in the emergency operation center. That would be something that we did during Hurricane Sandy.

Our emergency operation center is amazing. It is a state-of-the-art facility and it has a lot of capability, but when you get to an event as big as something like Hurricane Sandy, it's just not still not big enough. We ended up having to have staff at some of our remote locations. At the time, I remember I was working with FEMA and I was here for Hurricane Sandy.

I remember sitting in the corner, on the floor trying to get my work done and New York City Emergency Management staff just trying to work around us and trying to find place for us because there were so many people that come to help. You have not just all of your city agencies, but now you bring the whole federal footprints in and that is a huge footprint as well as all of the partner agencies that want to come in and assist.

Then so we would manage that incident through the emergency operations center. Then once the incident is stabilized then you would scale it back down very similar to how we escalated to that.

Decision-making with Imperfect Information

During that time, another really key function that emergency management is responsible for and that's at any stage whether it's just sending the CIC out into the field or just what our Watch Command does on a 24/7 basis is collecting and disseminating information. One of the hallmarks of I think what really makes emergency management different in a standalone discipline and field is its ability to create that shared situational awareness. Trying to create that common operating picture especially in a city like New York where you have so many different pieces of information, so many different agencies that are doing activities to help stabilize that event.

Our job is to try to bring that all together in a way that is usable for senior leadership to make decisions so people have good information so the mayor can go out and talk to the public and let the public know what's going on and instill that confidence back into the public. It's a really hard thing to do. It's super hard in those first few days after an incident happens where it truly is like chaos. There's so much going on.

Trying to really get a good understanding of what's happening is the biggest challenge in the first few days. Again, I think that's one of the skillsets that is so critical and what really makes emergency management stand out amongst all of these other fields is because we are trying to

bring it in from every other discipline and trying to create that shared situational awareness for the public and for leadership.

Speaking of the public, another core function that we have then is to educate the public and prepare the public and prepare the community. I do remember when I was here during Hurricane Sandy and the one thing that I was taught and told and learned immediately and have been able to bring with me is that New York City is a city of neighborhoods. While it is 8.6 million people, it's all of these small, little microneighborhoods across the city, across the five boroughs. You have to be able to get out and talk to them.

Our Community Preparedness Division has done an excellent job of really trying to get out and reach the communities. I'm going to probably screw this up, but I know that they have three pillars that they have been looking at. Maybe you can help me figure this out if I get it screwed up here Nancy, but they're talking about the way that you help a community get prepared is first you have to know the community. The community has to come together and want to become prepared.

Then the community has to have a connection to the government. They have to have a connection to us at New York City Emergency Management so they know where they fit in to the entire preparedness scheme, what resources they can get from us, what we can give to them, what they can offer us during the time of the disaster.

Then the community has to be connected to the community-based organizations. They need to know who the faith-based organizations are. They need to know who the other nonprofit organizations are out there that can help them be better prepared. When all three of those things come together, then you have a community that is well on its way to becoming a very prepared and mature community in the event of a disaster.

Enhancing Resiliency and Mitigation

We have done a lot of work trying to get there over the last several years, long before I came here. I'm really excited about some of the plans that they have moving forward about taking these communities at that grassroots level and really helping them create community-based plans. Because at the end of the day, if it weren't for the communities, we wouldn't even need to be here, right? The more we can do to help them be prepared, the easier our job will be when that next Hurricane Sandy type incident happens.

Then the last core function that I'll talk about that we do in emergency management is mitigation. There's been a lot of work done in this whole risk reduction realm. There's a lot of conversation across the community, across the nation on the effects of climate change and what that's going to do to our risk and how do we mitigate against that risk and not just going into 2020, but going into 2050. Looking at changing our risk flood maps and what they will look like, what sea level rise in 2050 and building mitigation measures that are going to help protect us against those things as we go well into the future not just over the next five years.

I have seen a lot of mitigation plans. I've seen a lot of mitigation work done across the nation through my time when I was with FEMA. I got to say that the mitigation work being done here

in New York City to me is second to none. They have an amazing mitigation plan that is online that if you have not had a chance to take a look at, it's very interactive. It's incredibly useful to help you really understand the risks here in New York City and some of the work that's being done to help mitigate against those risks.

Then we're doing things like Interim Flood Protection Measures that we were just the other day unveiled some of the artwork that was put on then here in Lower Manhattan. Then there's the long-term mitigation measures that are planned out again going into 2050 and what those long-term mitigation measures will look like, which I think is part of the topic of the event on the 17th. There's so much work that can be done that still needs to be done in order to really address a lot of these future risks that we haven't even thought of yet. We're planning for the ones we know of, but there's all of these risks that we haven't even thought of yet.

And so, it's going to be a really interesting time and mitigation and risk reduction is a topic that, again, as you're talking about the finding the role of emergency management and how it is a standalone discipline and field that is one of the core areas of what we do in emergency management to help protect the communities.

That was a lot about New York City Emergency Management. Any questions about what we do? Because I'm going to go back in time a little bit now and just talk about my path to getting here.



Leading Emergency Management into the Future

I'll start with my time in emergency management in Colorado where, again, I was a Captain on the fire department. This was in Aurora, Colorado. As emergency management is an ever changing and growing field, it was definitely a growing field back when I took over which was in 1995. It was right before Hurricane Katrina had hit. And so, as I was trying to redefine what

emergency management was in Aurora, Colorado, Hurricane Katrina happened and I was quickly thrown into a leadership role that I wasn't quite ready for.

They were going to bring 2000 evacuees from Louisiana. They were taking them right from the bridges still. People were still on the bridges during Hurricane Katrina in Louisiana a week later so this was about a week after it hit. They were flying them in to Buckley Air Force base which is in Aurora, Colorado. We were going to house them at an old dormitory, the old Lowry Air Force Base which was also in Aurora, Colorado.

The state called me in as the new emergency manager for Aurora and said, "Hey, we're bringing all these people into your community and we're going to make you the instant commander." That was a big shock. That was definitely drinking from the firehose a little bit as I was trying to figure out how to manage this mass care mission, and a mass care from a different level. The things that we learn there of really trying to manage a disaster backwards than the way it usually happens so disasters usually happen locally then you ran out of resources and then the state gets involved, the state runs out of resources, they bring in the federal government.

This one was the federal government called the state and said, "We're sending you some folks." The state called me and said, "We're sending you some folks, make it happen." A complete backwards type response to emergency management and we did though. We brought in 2000 evacuees. I was, again, emergency manager who was under the fire department and so I reported directly to the fire chief.

At the time, I was still a Captain and the Fire Chief was amazing. He took titles away from everything and what we did was he put Battalion Chiefs and Deputy Chiefs underneath me and the command structure and said, "This is an emergency management function. This is not a fire department operation and you will all report to her." And so, it was really a bit over my head as we were going through this, but at the same time, I have the trusting confidence of my leadership to allow me to take on this mission and we were able to bring everybody in and apply some creative and innovative solutions.

Importance of Innovation

We'll talk a little bit more about innovation as we go on, but as we start right here and the innovation side of things that was really trying to create solutions that weren't going to have additional impact on the system itself. For example, we brought in 2000 evacuees that had just been on a bridge for a week and they had no belongings with them whatsoever. We were really concerned that there was going to be a large impact to the 911 system.

And so, we worked with the local medical center and we stood up a 24-hour clinic at the shelter site at the mass care site so people could go there and we wouldn't have an increased burden on the 911 system and it really worked well. We kept that going the entire time that we had people within the mass care center that we had developed there. It was also an opportunity to learn about the importance of collaboration inclusiveness. And so, it was bringing not just the fire department staff that were working there with me together, but bringing in the rest of the community.

One of my biggest surprises during that event was how quickly people were wanting to move on with their lives. They were looking to go to the job help place so they could find work. They were looking to get their kids enrolled in school. When I first started in the position, when we first started bringing people in, I didn't even think about these things. I thought people were going to be worried about having a roof over their head, having some new clothes to change into, making sure that they had some security, trying to reconnect them with their loved ones because many of them had been separated from their families.

It really wasn't but a couple days that they were there, they were ready to move on. That was a big learning point for me. They really know that there's no clear line in the recovery process as I had gone into this operation thinking. It's very individual for each person. Each person is going to have their own recovery needs throughout that process. My initial assumptions were true for some, but they weren't for everybody. And so, being able to approach your services to the community that you're providing services to and understanding that each individual is an individual and their needs are going to be very different and unique from the person that's right next to them. That was a really important lesson learned.

I think that the last piece on this is the importance of knowing that you're going to find times. You're going to be put in times where you're going to be put in positions that you're way over your head and being able to not let people know you're over your head and being able to demonstrate that calm presence that then sets the tone for everybody else. I learned that early in my career as a firefighter. It was one of the most valuable lessons I think that I got in firefighting is having that calm tone and to set the stage.

Examples I have of that where that didn't happen is brand new firefighter going to a fire, first fire for me. We had an acting officer that was responding in the front. It was just a standard response. Smoke showing is what was called in and so as we're coming up on scene, he's looking over where the call came in from and he was going through his normal standard size up of I have a single family structure fire with nothing showing on engine one will be in command. Then he turned this way and the house was on fire. He said, "Holy expletive, we've got fire." He just screamed it.

And so, it just sent my blood rising, my blood pressure up and having to readjust from that calm to the not so calm and going into that. It was a lesson of really being able to, that's why you train and you go through those motions of being able to set that just very calm presence, command presence. Lesson that I took from there into this incident with Hurricane Katrina and just letting people know that, yeah, we're all over our head. We've never done this before. Two thousand people, Aurora was not a big town. And so bringing in 2000 evacuees was a big undertaking for us. Together we came together and collaborated and we're creative and we're able to find a solution to meet all of their needs.

Any questions about my time in Aurora? So that was my first exposure to emergency management. And then, I decided to make a change. I went to work for FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency in 2011. In between that time, I was actually still in the

international guard and I had deployed over to cutter and I was spending some time in Afghanistan and Iraq.

While I was there, I decided that again, I was looking for another new change, another new challenge. I had been with the emergency management for about five years. It had kind of plateaued. I had taken it to a new level, but I needed to learn some more. And so I took a risk, applied for some jobs with FEMA and took this position in 2011.

While I was with FEMA, I went to many disasters across the country. As an FCO, one of the first disasters again, being thrown into something before you're quite ready for it. I went to North Dakota, which you wouldn't think of they have many disasters, but they get some massive flooding every year.

This year, in 2011, is when the source river that comes out of Canada had flooded and completely devastated Minot, North Dakota and took out bridges that connected the northern and southern ends of the city and what normally was a 15-minute drive to get across town, now took three hours because you had to go completely around the river.

And so, it was a really interesting time while I was over there. Again, I was two months into the job and it was literally one of the most complex disasters that FEMA had seen since Katrina. After Katrina, you had ... There was the other hurricane right after that, Rita right after that. But then after that, there was kind of a lull in some of the complicated disasters. In North Dakota, in Minot, again, a small community, they had ... The number 2000 seems to be coming up all the time, they had 2000 people, 2000 homes that were displaced and we had to find a way to house them.

It was at the time when all the fracking is going on in North Dakota and there was this big boom in North Dakota, and all the hotels were always 100% booked. There were no rental units in North Dakota and in Minot. At McDonald's, they were paying \$18 an hour to work at McDonald's because that's how much they had to pay to compete against some of the places in the oil fields.

They were in the midst of this huge economic boom, which is great until you have a disaster. And then you have to figure out how to house people. FEMA brings in local hires. They hire from the local community. They couldn't get anybody hired. The closest place you could find a hotel room was two and a half hours away. And so, there were all of these unique and complex interdependencies that were happening that we need to figure out how we were going to provide for all of these people that were impacted by the disaster.

With that disaster, again, it was really about being comfortable in a position where you're over your head. Part of doing that was relying on my experience that I had gained from both the military and my time with the city of Aurora. But also, I had a really great staff, and relying on my staff to know their jobs while I was still learning. FEMA was really good and these FCO positions about it was all on-the-job training. There was no formal training program that was you get hired and then you go out into the disaster.

That's the way this one was in North Dakota. You had a lot of information coming in from different directions. When I talked earlier about shared situational awareness, this was an opportunity to try to create shared situational awareness where not only was there this massive flooding going on in Minot, but it was going on across the state.

In Bismarck, there was flooding along the Red River. In Grand Forks, there was flooding and they were doing a lot of different search and rescue operations bringing in different agencies to do that. And so, while the focus and we had a tendency to really focus on this area of most impact, it was actually a statewide response as well.

And so, when we talk about the skill of try and create shared situational awareness in this instance, it was about bringing in the information from all of the different impacted jurisdictions and helping to use that information to prioritize where we were going to send the resources as well as request other resources.

While this was a major incident going on in North Dakota, this was at the same time that Irene was getting ready to hit the east coast. There were several other flooding events happening in the east coast. 2011 turned out to be one of the busiest years FEMA had on record since Hurricane Katrina, busier year since then. It was one of the busiest years. And so, not only was I trying to adjudicate resources within North Dakota, we were nationally trying to adjudicate resources across the country because there were so many different events happening at the same time.

One way to do that and one of the things that I learned while I was there is having the ability to focus on the outcomes you're trying to achieve. Because you're going to want to do a lot and there's a lot of things that you have to do. If you focus on the outcomes and have outcome-written objectives instead of very output-driven objectives, outcomes are way more valuable than outputs because the outcomes are going to help you prioritize the things that you need to do and then be able to adequately assign those resources to do that.

I spent seven months in North Dakota, but it was really educational. I learned so much about the role of emergency management from the federal level but as well as from the state level. Having only known it from Aurora, I got to see it now from the state of North Dakota and the city of Minot and all of the different things that needed to happen.

In the end, we ended up putting up a thousand mobile home units on individuals' properties. And then we brought in another thousand mobile home units and put them up around the city of Minot to help house the individuals. I want to say the last mobile home unit was removed from Minot about two years ago. It took that long to get people transitioned back into what their normal would be. It was a long recovery from North Dakota.

When I left North Dakota, I went to several other disasters across the country, but then FEMA asked me to do something that again I had never done before and that was to start this new program called the FEMA Corps Program. I had left a couple of disasters and this was a pilot program that was just getting started in 2012. It was a partnership between FEMA and AmeriCorps and NCCC. I can never remember what NCCC stands for, National Civilian Conservation Corps I believe.

It's a program where AmeriCorps brings together 18 to 24-year-olds for a year of service, a year of public service. They do this year of service. When they're done, they get some tuition reimbursement and they meet some of the requirements. For many of them, they're doing a gap year from school and they're getting some requirements for that. It's a really great opportunity for the youth of our nation to be able to give back to communities.

It was a very interesting opportunity for me as well. It was the vision of our then, or FEMA's then deputy administrator, Rich Serino and he had seen some of the AmeriCorps teams on disaster doing some mucking and gutting. He decided he wanted to bring a team together that would do nothing but disaster support.

And so, the first teams came onboard late in 2012. The first disaster that they all deployed to is New York City, Hurricane Sandy. It was an amazing opportunity. And so, I had just started taking over the program. The business case had been developed. I came in just as they were starting to deploy. I met them all here at Hurricane Sandy.

It was at the time about 600 individuals. They were spread across New York City and New Jersey. It was a great opportunity to really see how you can bring innovation into a disaster response and allow people the space to be creative. You can really do great things.

In this example during Hurricane Sandy, when the FEMA Corps Program had started, they had cross-trained a group of individuals into two disciplines that FEMA does at the time. That was community relations where we send people out into field and they hand out fliers after a disaster, give them the 1-800 number or the website where they can go register for assistance. We had also trained them in applicant services where you could physically go support the national service processing center and register people for assistance.

And so, as they were walking the streets of New York City, these individuals that were trained in both were walking around and talking to people saying, "Hey, have you registered for assistance." They said, "No." They'd say, "Why?" "Well, I don't have a computer. My phone isn't working. There were power outages," or a lot of struggles in the immediate days after Sandy. And so, they sat down. Opened up their laptop and started registering people in the streets of New York City for assistance.

This is an interesting example too of the cultural shifts that happen on age groups within a community or within an organization, where those that had been doing this for a long time were telling the FEMA Corps teams, "WE can't do that. We've never done it that way so we can't do it that way now." And they were saying, "Well, why not? You taught me how to do both of these, why can I? I can register them right here."

And so, we were to establish a pilot program here in New York City and it actually changed the entire way FEMA does business and how they support disaster survivors going forward. Community Relations doesn't exist anymore. It's now called Disaster Survivor Assistance Teams. That was born right here in the streets of New York City as these FEMA Corps teams were going out and trying to register people for assistance.

The other part of that program that was just really fascinating to me though as well is there was so much resistance. There's always so much resistance to change. FEMA reservist cadre is typically more of an elderly cadre. I think the average age of the reservist is somewhere around 60, 65 and I'm bringing in all these 18 to 24-year-olds.

And so, they were really concerned that they were being driven out, which wasn't the case at all. They had a year of service. And then they would move on to something else. Or I would go out and try to socialize this with all the different regions. I went to all 10 FEMA regions and talked to all the leadership there. They just felt like they were going to have to babysit these 18 to 24-year-olds, which wasn't the case at all. They ended up teaching them how to do things many times.

It was a very persistent effort of going out and trying to educate and socialize what this group of really talented young individuals could bring to a disaster. Today, this is '12, so seven years later, when I talked to some of my colleagues at FEMA that were the biggest naysayers of this program in the beginning are now like, "I couldn't do my job without them. They're so eager and they're so excited." While the Disaster Survivor Assistance Teams are one example of some of the really great innovation that they did, they have done that across the agency and really been able to help people think differently and from a different lens and come up with new and better and more efficient ways to do things.

I spent about a year with the FEMA Corps team socializing that, giving them up to speed and getting the entire FEMA community understanding what they could bring to the table. Again, they are well and strong and still out there. And so, I was asked to move on from that position and to lead one of FEMA's National Incident Management Assistance Teams.

And so, during that time, they were going through a transformation. They went from a team of I think 12 people to a team of 38 people. I mean, it had just started. This whole transformation just started when I had come in there. It was definitely a very diverse and multigenerational group of individuals.

The National Incident Management Assistance Teams or National IMATs, their purpose is to be ready to respond to the worst disasters and to be able to go within two hours, mobilize within two hours and be at the impacted community within 12 hours of the largest of the largest events. You saw them mobilize for Hurricanes Harvey and Maria, for typhoons over in Guam and across the country for the wildfires and mudslides in California.

These teams bring together very specialized trainings and trained individuals top of their career, top of their fields so they can go out and stabilize the incident. The whole intent was that these teams would go out and stabilize an incident, reconstitute, go back to their home base and get ready for the next deployment.

We found is that because some of these were so complicated, these National IMATs would end up staying for months at a time instead of reconstituting. And so, there was always this back and forth on how are we using them, what's the best way to use them and how can we improve that readiness cycle for them.

They also became kind of the go-to resource for the administrator himself. Craig Fugate loved to tap in to the National IMAT teams for any unique problem that he has. While I may or may not have said from New York City Emergency Management, we like to view ourselves as the go-to agency to solve big problems, that's what the National IMAT was for the administrator, the go-to team to solve the big problems that he didn't have anyone else to solve.

As we find this evolution of emerging threats continue to expand and the those things that we still don't know we're going to face in the future, the National IMATs really built their training program around critical thinking, problem solving and data-driven decision making.

One of the first things that was outside of a normal disaster that we got activated to support was Ebola, the response to Ebola. We did a number of things to help support the response to Ebola. First as the lead agency for the secretary of homeland security to help provide that situational awareness, that shared situational understanding for the entire federal agency.

While FEMA was not the lead federal agency, Health and Human Services was the lead federal agency in supporting that, in particular CDC. We had a responsibility to integrate in with them and help bring their information into a form that was usable by the rest of the agencies.

Some of the other things that we were able to do with Ebola is we did go out to the five receiving airports, JFK being one of them, and worked with Customs and Border Protection as well as the staff at the airport to teach them how to put together a command structure and a process flow for processing patients. We'd report to CDC on what the requirements would be and built it on the fly as the training program to get people up to speed on what they would need to do if they had a patient come in that they suspected to be infected with Ebola.

Then there were other just off the wall kind of things that the administrator reached out to us for. There was a Microsoft patch that was being released and all of the computers needed to be updated with this patch so there was going to be this, I don't know, I'm not an IT person. It was going to be this massive just breakdown of all of our computer systems. FEMA didn't have a good accounting of actually even how many computers they owned. And so, we literally came in to put a structure around how to track information creating shared situational awareness of where we were at with who had the computers, who had them updated, what's still needed to be done.

Even though we knew nothing about IT, it's the skill that emergency managers' brain and being able to figure out what the right data is and put that in a usable form so other people that need to make decisions can make decisions, creating that common operating picture for everyone to use and then be able to create senior leader briefs so we can get our leadership comfortable with where we're at in the progress towards achieving whatever outcome we decided to achieve.

And so, the National IMATs became that kind of go-to resource. It's really where emergency management continues to go today, is that go-to resource of solving those problems that we still don't quite know what we're going to have solve in the future in addition to knowing what our threats are here in our community and having plans in place to support those threats.

Influence Over Authority

After a long time with FEMA, after about seven years with FEMA, I decided and I was on the road again almost all of the time, I decided I need a little break. I took a little stint in the private sector and consulted back to FEMA, was able to provide guidance and advice at a different level with a different lens. The interesting thing during that time as a consultant is that you are no longer the decision maker working in an environment where you used to be the decision maker. It's an interesting transition to make. It really goes to the point and another skill that emergency managers bring to the table is that ability to have influence instead of authority.

One of the things about emergency management is you are often given an awful lot of responsibility and have high expectations for the things that you need to achieve but aren't often given the true authority to accomplish those. In some cases, you are, but in many cases, you're not. And so, you bring influence to the table and it's a skill set that we need to bring to bear every single day with what we're doing and being able to work with our partners and help come to a consensus decision on our way forward even though you can't mandate it.

I saw that here in the private sector, same skill set being able to use and helping FEMA and advise them on things that they could do to improve. I saw that when I was at the National IMAT. I saw that with FEMA Corps. I couldn't mandate that they use FEMA Corps teams but eventually everybody wanted them. That skill of influence versus authority is a really strong skill that really separates out emergency management I think from other disciplines where they have the authority to say, yes, we're going to do this, and where you'll often find very hierarchal organizations and many of our other first responder disciplines. While we tend to be structured around the hierarchal organization, our decision making is not necessarily hierarchal and the decision making comes from having that collaboration and that influence in working together.

With that background and that path and I think we're still pretty good on time, a little bit about how applying some of these skills and my path forward here at New York City and things that I want to do. I think the first thing that I'm really focused on is making sure that we help redefine how others view not just New York City Emergency Management but emergency management as a whole. It goes back to the first part of my conversation where we are leading the coordination of different agencies.

We are leaders in helping bring the right resources to the table to achieve the outcomes that we want to achieve. We don't just coordinate. We are looked at to take that leadership goal and that leadership responsibility. We do have a responsibility whether we have the authority or not, we have a responsibility to take that leadership role in emergency management and make sure that we are bringing together all of the right agencies to solve the problems that we're faced with for that day.

And so, as we're redefining that role in emergency management, my vision is really trying to develop more than an emergency management department, but really developing an emergency management system that will lead the city's efforts to be better prepared, to be able to respond and recover and make sure that we are ready for the next disaster. Part of that includes reducing risks. It includes reaching out to the community and making sure that they're prepared, but it's also about making sure the city is ready for the next disaster.

Future Directions for NYCCEM

With that and I've had a lot of conversations, I did round tables with all of my junior stuff. I did one-on-one meetings with all of my mid-managers and my senior managers. I came up with four principles that I'm going to propose to my own team on Friday at my next all hands meeting of how I think we want to move forward. I'm going to get some of their feedback on it, but you'll be my first Guinea pigs in sharing these principles as we go forward here.

The first one is *culture* is the foundation of our success and that culture piece is how we view ourselves, how others view us and how we communicate our expectations of what emergency management is. I think that's going to be a critical component of not only just defining what we are in New York City but really being able to set the model for the rest of the nation moving forward.

The second principle I have is *communities* are at the center of everything that we do. If it weren't for the communities, we wouldn't need to be here. If all of our effort is focused outside of the community and we don't have an equal balance of effort focused on making sure the community itself is prepared, and I'm not saying that we don't. We put a lot of effort. New York City does an amazing job of making sure our communities are prepared, but from a national perspective on emergency management, that really is our focus. Everything we should be doing should be about making our communities are better prepared.

My third principle is *citywide capability and readiness is a shared responsibility*. While New York City has a large emergency management department comparatively speaking across the nation, it's still small in comparison to what New York City has with 330,000 employees and 8.6 million residents, emergency management can't do it alone. It's going to take all of the city to come together and make sure that we are working collectively and collaboratively to make sure the city as a whole is ready for the next event.

Then the last one I have is *clear governance and a strong leadership* enables us to succeed. And so, making sure that if we need new authorities, we can put those in place viewing ourselves as leaders and demonstrating that leadership when we do go to incidents. That's going to make a big difference in making sure that we as a city succeed in responding to recovering from and mitigating future risk.

Some of my goals that I have are first is creating that culture of innovation and creativity. As I talked about my FEMA Corps example, I think it's really important to have a safe space for people to be creative, that they can have a safe space to fail. Not all ideas are going to succeed the first time, but that's okay. We need to be able to provide them the opportunity to think creatively, put those ideas forward and create new ways of doing things.

This isn't just in our steady state or our blue sky days. This is during disasters as well. There's a great theory out there about mode R versus mode C, if anybody has read it. There's these routine responses and then there's these complex responses. In a routine response, we have a tendency to keep putting more resources on something and we just keep adding resources. Eventually if you add enough resources, the situation will mitigate.

But then there's events that either switch from routine to extremely complex immediately or they start out as complex and throwing more resources on it is not going to solve the problem. It's about coming up with creative and innovative solutions. You have to approach it differently. Even during a disaster or an event, an incident, we have to be able to have a group of people that can think creatively on how to approach that.

And so, one of the things that we've done and one of the first initiatives I was able to implement is create this innovation team. They are going to be receiving input from across our agency on different ways that we can do things, but they will also be activated in the event of a response to be looking at how we're approaching it and seeing if we can do things differently.

Innovation is often thought of as technology, but it's not just technology. It can be any number of things. I did bring some show and tell items here. We had a great program. One of our girls that works for us, one of our ladies that works for us wanted to have our own superhero. When we talk about community preparedness, she came up with Ready Girl. We have an ... We partnered with Marvel Comics and they've created our own comic book. We go out to events at schools and we help spread the preparedness message through this Ready Girl concept and giving out comic books. That's an example of innovation. That's not technology related and a really great opportunity to help get the preparedness message out.

It's been extremely successful. I'm going to see one of the events, I haven't seen one yet, at the end of this month. When we're done here, we're done with questions, I have just a few up here. I don't know if I have enough for everybody. It's a really great example of innovation is not just for responding, but it's also for any of our core missions to include preparedness.

Recognizing Emergency Management as a Stand-alone Discipline

Another one of my goals is around this concept of recognizing emergency management as its own standalone discipline. We see it more now, but we're not there yet. We need to get better at it. I just came back from a meeting with some of my fellow emergency managers at some of the larger emergency management agencies across the nation. I'm finding there's still a lot of role identity problems. They're taking emergency management and putting it back underneath police and fire where it used to be its own standalone agency.

I think we as a field and a discipline need to make sure we help people understand that there is a difference. There is a skill set in emergency management that you don't find in other disciplines. It's really important for us to share that. One of the things that I want to be able to accomplish while I'm here in New York City is being able to help set that message and set a standard for other emergency management agencies across the nation to hopefully use to help them articulate why they need to be an emergency management agency. What do they do that's different than the fire department, different than the health department, different than the police department? Why are they unique and why do they need to have the recognition? That's one of my goals that I think that we can do while we're here.

Again, it started as a civil defense program, emergency management, way back when and it was also a very reactive discipline and turn into a much more proactive discipline moving forward. I

think the thing that we need to be able to do is continue the more proactive side of what we're doing and help people understand the benefits and the return on investment that comes with having that proactive presence from an emergency management agency.

Addressing Novel and Emerging Threats

I also want to make sure that we, as an agency as well as across the nation, are putting together the right resources to address those emerging threats. There's novel threats, those things that we just don't know about yet. I talked a little bit already about this routine versus complex disasters.

I think when you're going into the complex disaster side of it, there's some things that you don't have that you have in the routine side of it. It's again another differentiator from emergency management. You don't have a script. When you're getting into this novel emerging threat, there's no checklist. You're having to figure out how to do things and problem solve on the fly.

They have this myth of scalability where we talked about routine emergencies and you keep putting more resources on it. Complex disasters are not necessarily scalable. They're just different. You have to create a solution around them. You want to be able to do a really rapid assessment, but you're not going to be able to. You're going to have to be able to use the tools that you have and the information that you have and you're going to have to get really comfortable with risk, understanding risk and knowing that you're going to make decisions without perfect information.

You're going to have to be able to bring in a group of people that can think critically and then solve problems based on that limited information. You're going to have to have the ability to implement these really new and novel ideas and creative solutions that have a tolerance for mistakes because those mistakes will happen. You'll have to change your decisions on the fly as these complex disasters continue to evolve.

Improving Data and Technology in EM

Part of all this is increasing our ability you maximize technology to help us do that. We are in this 24/7 news cycle. We have social media out there and many different venues. We have to be able to communicate to our communities in a very different way than we had to 10 years ago.

We also have to be able to plan for how we're going to do this without technology. What are we going to do during another Sandy where you didn't have power? Houston lost their 911 center during Hurricane Harvey. Puerto Rico lost power for months during Hurricane Maria. Of course, there were all the power outages and the fuel shortages here during Hurricane Sandy.

Data-driven decision making and using technology is a great tool and a great asset. It's something that emergency management needs to continue to grow and utilize, but you also have to plan for when it's not there and make sure that you have redundant measures in place when you have degrading communications capability. You have to be able to reach people and coordinate that response to that event.

Increased Readiness

Another focus then is on increased readiness of the city. I talk a lot about community preparedness, but when I look at what we are internally and what we're trying to do for the stuff within the city, it's about making sure they are ready for the next disaster. That's done through an integrated readiness cycle where you develop plans for those most probable events that you're going to go to or you develop plans for those most ... Those that will have the most impact.

Then you build a training program around them and you train your staff to these plans. Then you exercise them and see how well your plans are written, adjust them and then you update your plan based on that. This integrated readiness cycle is a critical component to just always having that continuous improvement mind and having a model that allows your organization to mature as you continue to grow and expand your capabilities.

Lastly, we talked a lot about or a little bit about all the future threats with climate change and sea level rise and the things that we just don't know yet. And so, enhancing resiliency and, seeing mitigation is going to be one of those investments that is going to be critical for us to help us do our jobs less often hopefully, but if we have to respond, it will reduce the impact and we can have a greater impact on the community itself.

In closing, just I'm really passionate about the field of emergency management. I think that there's so much opportunity going forward that it's a great time to be in the field of emergency management. I'm really excited to be part of the process of really trying to shape what it looks like into the next century.