



Prioritizing Preparedness at FDNY

At the beginning of World War II, Winston Churchill said, "if we are together nothing is impossible; if we are divided all will fail." Today we unfortunately find ourselves engaged in another war—one which has brought nearly 100 of our own from New York to the Persian Gulf—and the past 18 months have certainly challenged our Department with a similar level of intensity. But in that same time we have remained together, and we have achieved great gains.

This issue of *Viewpoint* serves two purposes. It underscores some of our achievements of the past year—such as faster EMS response times to life-threatening emergencies and historic reductions of fire-related civilian fatalities—and it hones in upon a topic prominent in headlines, around the firehouse kitchen table, and throughout the Department: preparedness.

In the past 18 months, we have focused on preparedness a great deal—by way of the McKinsey Report, at meetings with the Terrorism Preparedness Taskforce, through our Bureau of Health Services' Smallpox Vaccination Program, creating and training Incident Management Teams, and in initiatives that have equipped members of the Department with life-saving tools such as RadAlert radiation detectors, escape masks, and chemical protective clothing.

Given the importance of this topic, Chief Cruthers has devoted his Q&A in this issue of *Viewpoint* to many of the questions asked by firefighters, EMS personnel and civilian staff regarding our Department's preparedness. I urge you to read that article (p. 3) for it will give you a better sense of the many steps the Fire Department has taken to ensure that its personnel are as equipped and as prepared as possible to contend with the hazards of this post-9/11 wartime world.

We recognize that the first step in preparedness is ensuring that firefighters, EMTs and paramedics are provided with the best equipment available, so you can do your jobs safely and effectively. Every firefighter has a positive-pressure SCBA, which allows you to operate in a contaminated environment. Your SCBA is widely regarded as the *single best* piece of protection at any first responder's disposal in the event of an airborne chemical incident. It is also with an eye to safety that we have given escape

masks to all EMS personnel operating in the field, and have stockpiled caches of equipment and medicines in secure locations throughout the City for both fire and EMS personnel.

We also recognize the importance of training, because it's equally critical to *know* about the tools at your disposal and the protocols to follow at complex incidents. In that vein, we teamed up with the U.S. Forest Service to train teams of officers in the principles of large-scale incident management, and with Columbia University to give our staff Chiefs the skills they need to manage the Department. We have also given every member of the Department basic Haz-Mat awareness training, which is often supplemented by other training programs. For instance, we are moving forward with our program to train 20 ladder companies in Haz-Mat incident mitigation and rescue support. Beginning in April, over 600 members from 20 ladder companies will receive 40 hours of Technician-level Haz-Mat training, along with 40 hours of specialized rescue training. This training is absolutely critical if we are to confront the complexities of our post-9/11 world with calm and confidence.

This issue of *Viewpoint* also highlights the important work of many different parts of the Department, including the Bureau of Fire Prevention's recently increased inspection effort; preparedness initiatives spearheaded by our Planning Unit and augmented by the Terrorism Preparedness Taskforce, which connects the Department with world-class terrorism experts; and support services provided by both the Family Assistance Unit and the Counseling Service Unit. Each of these programs and initiatives have helped our Department address the unprecedented challenges of the past 18 months as we protect the lives and property of all New Yorkers.

We undoubtedly still have our fair share of challenges to face in the future. But because of your hard work and dedication to one another and to this Fire Department, we can face those challenges with confidence. You are the key to the preparedness equation. And you are the reason why this is—and will always be—the greatest Fire Department in the world.

Thank you for serving the citizens and visitors of New York City with unparalleled commitment and dedication. May your thoughts and prayers, like mine, be with those members of our Department who are now serving our country overseas. Regardless of how many thousands of miles they might have traveled, those bravest of New York's Bravest & EMS personnel will never be far from the hearts of those at home.



Commissioner's Message

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