



STATEMENT BY

THOMAS CURRAO
CHIEF OF COUNTERTERRORISM AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS
FIRE DEPARTMENT OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

BEFORE

THE HOUSE SUB-COMMITTEE ON
INTELLIGENCE AND COUNTERTERRORISM

ON

LOCAL EFFORTS TO COUNTER THE TERROR THREAT IN NEW YORK CITY

MAY 6 2019

Good afternoon Chairman Rose, Ranking Member Walker, and Members of the Subcommittee on Intelligence and Counterterrorism. My name is Tom Currao and I am the Chief of Counterterrorism and Emergency Preparedness for the New York City Fire Department (FDNY). Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the importance of the FDNY's continuing preparedness efforts in a dynamic threat environment.

The primary mission of the New York City Fire Department is to protect life and property. We execute this mission through firefighting, search and rescue, pre-hospital patient care, and hazardous material mitigation. However, as a professional fire service agency, our protection of life and property, particularly after September 11th, is increasingly in the homeland security realm via threat and risk analysis, developing and sharing intelligence at all levels of classification, as well as working within the first responder community to mitigate and recover from the effects of natural disasters.

In a post-9/11 environment, we operate in a constant state of evolution, seeking the latest innovations to keep up with emerging threats. We maximize our cooperation and coordination with federal, state, and local agencies, working together to prepare for, respond to, and mitigate the effects of security and disaster threats. All of this is made possible by the federal Homeland Security funding that we receive.

Post-9/11 Innovations

Following the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Report, the Fire Department has used federal funding to invest in several core areas. We expanded the Department's incident management capabilities by building a state-of-the-art Emergency Operations Center at FDNY headquarters to manage complex emergencies. We developed a 300-member Incident Management Team (IMT) to manage and coordinate emergencies. This team has activated for a variety of emergencies, including at explosion incidents, during extreme weather such as Superstorm Sandy, and at major fires. The IMT operates as a regional and national resource, serving the people of the New York-New Jersey metropolitan area as well as our fellow citizens around the country and the world when deployed in the wake of hurricanes and severe storms.

The Department created the FDNY Center for Terrorism and Disaster Preparedness (CTDP) to develop emergency response plans and create drills and exercises. We built advanced training facilities at the Fire Academy, including a Subway Simulator, a Shipboard Firefighting Simulator, and a marine-based Damage Control Simulator. We've also developed specialized units and preparedness capabilities within our Special Operations Command such as HazMat, HazTac Ambulances, and Technical Decontamination Engines. The Department built advanced Technical Rescue capabilities across Rescue Operations and the FDNY's Special Operations

Command. Members are trained to respond in various tech Rescue environments (for Search and Rescue and Patient Extrication), including: building collapses, incidents in the NYC Subway, and high-angle rescues. We also created tactical water rescue teams to rescue people impacted by floods and hurricanes.

Following the Paris attacks of 2015, the Commissioner tasked Department leadership with designing a response mechanism that would be ready for quick deployment to such incidents. Using federal funding, the Department created the Counterterrorism Rescue Task Force, in which specially-trained EMS personnel operate in conjunction with NYPD force protection in “warm zones” during active shooter events to triage and provide lifesaving care, such as bleeding control; in those moments, every second counts.

We have also enhanced our Urban Search and Rescue teams and Special Operations Command Task Force, and we’ve built a formidable marine fleet to patrol and protect New York Harbor. Marine assets include a tiered system of response boats, ranging from 140-foot boats for large-scale disasters, mid-sized boats with more maneuverability, to smaller medical response boats. These are also a regional asset, responding primarily within the Port of New York and New Jersey but with the ability to respond to emergencies throughout the Northeast.

Cooperation and Coordination

The FDNY cannot operate at our highest capacity without working hand-in-glove with our partners at the NYPD, New York City Emergency Management (NYCEM), the Port Authority of New York New Jersey (PANYNJ), the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA), the United States Coast Guard (USCG), the New York State Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF), and many departments and first responder agencies here in New York and across the country.

Only a short while after its formation, the Rescue Task Force was deployed in response to the 2016 Chelsea Bombing. In June 2017, when a disgruntled doctor killed one person and wounded six others at Bronx Lebanon Hospital, the Rescue Task Force entered the hospital to treat seriously wounded patients even as the gunman was still being sought. It was also deployed in response to a pipe bomb that was detonated during a morning rush hour at the Port Authority. Each deployment involves FDNY and NYPD members working in concert, operating as a single unit.

The cooperation exhibited by the agencies during live emergencies does not just happen on its own; rather, it is the product of intense training and preparation so that the when a call comes in, the teams work together seamlessly. The Center for Terrorism and Disaster Preparedness (CTDP) – FDNY’s in-house planning and preparedness group – works with local and regional partners to

develop emergency response plans and carry out joint exercises and drills. On average, CTDP runs 40 preparedness exercises a year. Recent examples include active shooter drills with the NYPD, Ebola pathogen drills with New York City and Long Island area hospitals, and a Cyber Security drill with West Point Cadets. We also conduct joint trainings with the Metropolitan Transit Authority, including a recent full scale shooter exercise in the Park Avenue Tunnel.

The Counterterrorism Task Force works extensively with NYPD counterparts, including an annual three-day training involving communications and movement of Rescue Task Force members, medical care and patient movement in the warm zone, self and buddy aide for injured members, improvised explosive device awareness, and drills around a variety of scenarios such as a classroom shooter with a secondary device. In 2018, we had 120 days of joint training. In 2019, approximately 100 Fire/EMS members and 60 NYPD members will receive the training each week. Last year, FDNY/NYPD Rescue Task Force deployed for pre-staged events 69 times, including a two-hour joint training session at each deployment. FDNY also conducts large-scale joint agency trainings, such as a three-day New York State homeland security training in Oriskany, NY. The FDNY also has a liaison to the Joint Terrorism Task Force.

Cooperation and communication between the Fire Department and the Police Department is as strong as it has ever been. This extends beyond response to planning and developing interagency standard operating procedures. In fact, there is a draft procedure that was recently developed by both of our agencies to address fire and smoke as a weapon in the high rise environment. In addition, we regularly share intelligence analysis with the NYPD Intelligence and Counterterrorism Divisions.

Emerging Threats

In 2004, the Department created the FDNY Center for Terrorism and Disaster Preparedness. Serving as the focal point of the Department's strategic preparedness, the CTDP creates dynamic and practical approaches to counterterrorism, disaster response, and consequence management. Core competencies of the Center include: Intelligence sharing; Weapons of Mass Destruction and security preparedness; Designing drills and exercises; and Emergency Response Planning, Education, and Technology.

We want to briefly share with the committee some of the emerging threats that we've been focusing on at the Center. One trend that we're tracking that appears to be on the rise is violence perpetrated by domestic extremists. This includes violence carried out by domestic individuals motivated by political, social, environmental, and religious movements. In the United States, and indeed on a global basis, this includes the white supremacist movement and its various subgroupings, anti-government extremist movements, and single-issue movements including anti-abortion, anti-

immigrant, and anti-Muslim extremists, among others. These attacks often involve firearms and improvised explosive devices. These weapons may be easy to obtain and construct using common materials and supported by digital instructional resources. Recent examples of attacks of this nature include the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting and an individual who sent pipe bombs to prominent political and media figures.

Another threat that we have been studying closely for years is the concept of complex-coordinated attacks. These are attacks that are characterized by multiple teams of attackers, multiple attack locations, and perhaps multiple types of weapons. Examples include attacks in Mumbai, Paris, Brussels, and the Easter Sunday attacks in Sri Lanka. Their complex and dynamic nature present operating challenges for first responders. An attack involving multiple forms of violence at disperse locations elevates the importance of communication and coordination among responders. Responses may require simultaneous action and sustained operations over a long period of time involving personnel from a wider response area than in a single isolated response, as well as a deliberate method of communicating with and providing warnings to the public. The Fire Department's Incident Management Team and operators train frequently with other first responder agencies and jurisdictions to be prepared for such an event. One specific example will take place on June 4 when the Fire Department will be taking part in an exercise with the U.S. Coast Guard responding to a hypothetical scenario of active shooters on multiple ferries in different areas of the city's waterways.

We also devote resources to planning and preparation around the threat of vertical terrorism, which is a terrorist incident in a high-rise building using automatic weapons, explosives, and potentially fire as a weapon. The most striking example of this is the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks. This is a particularly complex problem and involves coordinated planning and development of interagency standard operating procedures, to support further research, training, and exercises. Attacks of this nature present challenges both in reaching the perpetrator as well as reaching, caring for, and transporting patients. In many ways, the success of the law enforcement and fire service missions are intertwined and codependent. To prepare for this type of attack, the FDNY has conducted drills tailored to this scenario, including hosting a Vertical Terrorism Preparedness Workshop at 1 World Trade Center with our partners at NYPD, NYCEM, PANYNJ, the FBI, DHS, FEMA, and others.

Importance of Federal Funding

The Fire Department relies on federal funding to make smart investments in terrorism and disaster preparedness. The grants funds that we obtain has allowed us to create and maintain the capabilities that I've described here today and has enabled the Department to continue looking forward, proactively planning for the next wave of threats. In addition to the large equipment, we use

federal resources for critical equipment such as Personal Protective Equipment for our first responders. This gear is critical to the safety of our members when responding to and mitigate potential chemical, biological, and radiological weapons. When we received a call in 2014 that a patient in Hamilton Heights was exhibiting signs that he very likely had Ebola, FDNY Haz-Tac paramedics donned their TyChem-F suits and their Powered Air Purifying Respirators and relied on their training to successfully respond to, transport, and hand off the patient to an isolated section at Bellevue Hospital Center.

Proposed cuts under the current administration would significantly erode the progress that we have made in the years since 9/11. Cuts to our funding would result in the Center for Terrorism and Disaster Preparedness or the Fire Department Operations Center not having the resources available to adequately run. These cuts would severely impact the operation of our Incident Management Team, our Rescue Task Force, and other specialized teams.

First Responder Use of T-Band Spectrum

Finally, I would like to address T-Band spectrum, which is a portion of spectrum that is used for public safety communications in 11 heavily populated metropolitan areas. Currently, the Federal Communications Commissioner is required to reallocate and auction the T-Band spectrum by 2021. Since September 11th, the FDNY has systematically improved radio communications for our Firefighters and EMS personnel responding to fires and medical emergencies because those transmissions can so often mean the difference between life and death. Losing the T-Band spectrum would require billions of dollars to replace existing radios and infrastructure, devastate FDNY's operations at thousands of emergencies each day, and unnecessarily endanger the safety of New Yorkers. We appreciate the bi-partisan congressional effort to preserve the T-Band spectrum before it is reallocated for good.

It is an honor for the Fire Department to appear before you today. We appreciate your support and we look forward to a continued partnership with members of this committee and the Congress so that we are able to sustain existing capabilities and continue to adapt to new threats in order to protect the people of the New York City Urban Area.

I would be happy to take your questions at this time.