

THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
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CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

TRANSCRIPT: CITY HALL LEADERSHIP HOLDS STORM BRIEFING

First Deputy Mayor Lorraine Grillo: Thank you everyone for being here. My name is Lorraine Grillo. I am the first deputy mayor. And I'm here with my colleagues, including Sheena Wright, deputy mayor for strategic initiatives. Chancellor David Banks. Deputy Mayor Phil Banks, deputy mayor for public safety. Chief of Staff to the Mayor Frank Carone. Camille Joseph Varlack, senior advisor to the mayor. Zach Iscol, commissioner of the New York City Emergency Management. Laura Kavanagh, commissioner of the Fire Department. Jessica Tisch, commissioner of the Department of Sanitation. Vinny Sapienza, Chief Operating Officer of the Department of Environmental Protection. Leon Heyward, deputy commissioner for sidewalks and inspection management, Department of Transportation. John Garvey, deputy commissioner for ferries, Department of Transportation. Anthony Yuliano, deputy commissioner for operations, Community Affairs Units.

So I want to thank you all for joining today. So I've been in touch with the mayor. We've all been in touch with the mayor throughout the day, and he has asked that we provide all of you with an update on the city's full response to today's weather event, which I've just learned is named Winter Storm Elliott. We know that the Fire Commissioner Kavanagh has done a press briefing already in Staten Island and of course, our OEM commissioner, Iscol, has been speaking with the media all day, but we wanted to give all of you an opportunity to hear exactly where we are all at the same time, so nobody misses any information. Before we go into the storm, we wanted to give you an update on the tragic house fire in Staten Island. For that, we're joined, as I said, by Fire Commissioner Laura Kavanagh and Deputy Mayor Sheena Wright and Chancellor Banks who've just returned from that site.

So if you wouldn't mind, fire commissioner.

Fire Commissioner Laura Kavanagh: Sure. Thank you, first deputy mayor. As Lorraine mentioned, Deputy Mayor Sheena Wright and myself were on scene in Staten Island and provided an update there, but Mayor Adams wanted us to update everybody here who couldn't make it to the scene this afternoon. There was a fire on the second floor of a two-family home in Staten Island that took the lives of two very young children, and injured four other children, two of which remain in very critical condition at the hospital. While the fire is still under

investigation, we can certainly say this today, our hearts are broken. The city's hearts are broken today.

This is really an unspeakable tragedy for that family, for the neighborhood, for the local community, and for our whole city. We also had one firefighter on scene who sustained minor injuries, and I also want to thank all of our members, Fire and EMS, who responded and rushed to the scene so quickly. We all feel the loss of these two young children who had bright futures in front of us, and we grieve for them as a city. New York City is a family, the Fire Department is a family, and we care for one another and we will take care of this family as a city.

Turning it back over to the First Deputy Mayor Lorraine Grillo.

First Deputy Mayor Grillo: Thank you, commissioner. Now I'm going to turn it over to Commissioner Iscol from the Office of Emergency Management to give us a comprehensive update on the weather. Thank you.

Commissioner Zach Iscol, New York City Emergency Management: Thank you, first deputy mayor. Laura, our hearts are with the family. So my team has been out throughout the city today responding to this weather event alongside other first responders and other city agencies. This is a difficult weather event. We needed to prepare not only for rain, but also tidal flooding that was made worse by the New Moon, in addition to large amounts of wind offshore that was piling water into New York Harbor, in addition to Jamaica Bay, adding about 3 foot above mean tide flood surge. In addition to that, and we sort of transitioned out of that phase, now we're starting to prepare the city for the next phase, which is going to be a precipitous drop in temperature, going down to the low teens, single digits over the weekend. In addition to that, that leads to potential for black ice because the amount of precipitation and water on the ground that we also need to prepare for, in addition to high winds up to 60 mile per hour gusts later today.

To start preparing for this event, there is a significant interagency effort that takes place, starting about 96 hours ago. This includes constant communication with the mayor with senior leadership, and we do daily calls with our interagency team. This is about 90 agencies from the city, the state, the federal government, private sector partners, public sector partners, and nonprofits. During those calls, we start the call with a consult from the National Weather Service. We get twice daily briefings from the National Weather Service at 05:45 and at 3:15 where we go over the weather forecast and any changes to the forecast. We then go and do reporting from each of those agency partners about what they are going to be doing and what their potential concerns are in anticipation of this event and looking at the hazards and potential impacts and how we as a city will address them.

Those hazards include, as I mentioned, the black ice, tidal flooding, rainfall, so rainfall flooding, and others. The work that these agencies have done is remarkable. Starting this morning at 05:00, we activated the city's situation room. This includes 23 plus city agencies, state partners that are in constant communication all day long until this evening throughout this event to make sure we're in constant communication. In order to prepare for this event, some of the things that we did, Department of Sanitation, they've put 20 million pounds of salt out on the street. I believe it's 700 salt spreaders that they have located across the street in order to prepare for the black ice.

In addition to that, the NYPD has activated the Joint Traffic Management Center in order to make sure we are tracking any traffic issues, any power outages that could lead to traffic issues with traffic lights, et cetera.

In addition to that, they stationed multiple ESU trucks and other trucks around the city, including in areas prone to flooding in order to facilitate rescues if needed. They did a number of rescues this morning. None of them were life-threatening. Most of them were folks who were trapped in vehicles. The FDNY had a full complement of vehicles plus high axle vehicles operating. They also put EMS into a 12-hour surge schedule. Department of Environmental Protection along with DOT and DSNY did an incredible effort of clearing catch basins. We also deployed, we call, some interim flood protection measures to protect a wastewater treatment facility out in the Rockaways.

Our health and medical team, one of the things that we do when we have these types of events is we create some GIS mapping to understand where the flooding might be. We then look at what are all the different critical facilities in those areas. Do we have nursing homes, adult care facilities? We then start in consultation and in partnership with our state partners, we reach out to all of them. We identify what's their patient census? Does anybody need to be evacuated? Are their generators working? And then making sure that we are in close contact in case there's needs in those places. In addition to that, parks activated storm mobile last night where they can digest 311 calls and then send out inspectors to look at down trees, debris, things that need to be removed and as of this morning activated their down tree task force in order to address any of those issues, in addition to also implementing some internal flood protection measures across the city.

Con Ed has flown in over 600 personnel from around the country to augment their teams on the ground here. One of the issues with the high winds that we have coming in later today is it could lead to down power lines, power outages. We have these 600 additional personnel, that's about 300 additional trucks that are now located across the city in order to enable us to respond quickly to down to power outages and down power lines.

MTA activated their Incident Command Center as of 09:00 yesterday. They issued a soft ban on empty tractor trailers from 8:00 p.m. tonight until 8:00 p.m. tomorrow... Sorry, 8:00 p.m. last night to 8:00 p.m. tomorrow. They could extend that if conditions worsen. Just making sure, I'm checking my notes here to make sure I haven't missed anybody because there's so many amazing and remarkable agencies that are involved.

And in addition to this, because of the drop in temperatures, one of the prime objectives that we have in our winter weather plan is protecting vulnerable populations. So mentioned a little bit about the work we do with nursing homes, adult care facilities. In addition to that, DSS activated Code Blue, which are teams that are going out, finding homeless individuals living on the streets and making sure we're getting them into shelter. Today, this is incredibly important. As you all know, probably most of you walked out of your homes today. It's a little bit warmer. It's going to be a lot colder today. That change in temperature leaves us very concerned about people who are on our streets and making sure that they're getting into shelter.

So looking forward to your questions, can talk a little bit more about the impacts. We've been out there, we're also opening up two service centers in Hamilton Beach and in the Rockaways, one each later today where Red Cross will be able to provide shelter housing services or hotels to people that need it, in addition to cleaning kits and also other materials or things that people need. So those will be open at 4:30. I can make sure to get the addresses to you later today. Thank you.

Question: For Commissioners Kavanagh and Garvey, what is the status of the investigation at the last night's fire on the Sandy Ground, and how concerned are we about the other Ollis class ferries?

Commissioner Kavanagh: So the investigation is ongoing. It is done in conjunction with the Coast Guard because this was a maritime event. We did open the compartment to the engine room today and confirmed that the fire is out. So from this point forward, it'll be an investigation working with the Coast Guard on the cause.

Question: For Commissioner Garvey, how concerned are we about the other Ollis class ferries?

Captain John Garvey, Deputy Commissioner for Ferries, Department of Transportation: I spoke with the Coast Guard last night and that specific item came up and at this point there is no concern at all about it being a class item problem.

Question: For Commissioner Iscol, is there any preparation for storm shelters or is there anything in process with that now regarding the flooding, if people need some alternative places?

Commissioner Iscol: Yeah, so we worked with the Red Cross to identify blocks of hotel rooms to make sure that those were ready if people needed them in advance of the storm. We also identified four reception centers located in flood-prone areas and four potential service centers. So we opened up four library locations to make sure that they were ready if people needed a place to go throughout the day. In addition to that, we identified at least four, it might have actually been more than that, schools in the neighborhoods that we could immediately turn into service centers if needed.

Question: For Deputy Mayor Grillo, where is Mayor Adams? First deputy, I'm sorry. Mayor for the day Lorraine Grillo. Do you know where Mayor Adams is at?

First Deputy Mayor Grillo: Yes. I certainly do know where he is, but let me just say this to you. He might as well be here because we've been speaking to each other constantly throughout the day and speaking with all of us to keep updated on what's going on and to actually direct us to do this. But the mayor decided to take two days off and get some rest and instead of course he's dealing with this is, but just not here.

Question: So is he in New York City?

First Deputy Mayor Grillo: No.

Question: Where is he?

(...)

Question: This is for Commissioner Iscol. I was wondering if you could... Is there a number yet on the number of families or homes that are experiencing flooding?

Commissioner Iscol: We don't have that number yet. We're still collecting that information, still doing those assessments.

Question: Just to clarify, there are four libraries that have been identified as places where people can go if...

Commissioner Iscol: Yeah, so there's four libraries that we worked with to make sure that they were open and available throughout the day that people could go to. And then in addition to that, we identify in the run-up to these events, locations that we can turn into service centers, should we need them.

Question: 4:30, there are going to be two service centers. One in Hamilton Beach, one in the Rockaways?

Commissioner Iscol: Yep. In the Far Rockaways.

Question: That's where people can go if they're looking for cleaning kits and also to be placed in hotels?

Commissioner Iscol: Yes, that's correct.

Question: It's still unclear how many people will show up.

Commissioner Iscol: That is correct. Yep.

Question: Okay.

Commissioner Iscol: Thank you.

Question: I know in the city, we've had different types of weather, especially it's been very cold in the city at certain points in our history, single digits, teens. How bad would it have to get before, say, there's a curfew in place or mandate to close all bars, restaurants? That kind of thing. And at what point would there be road closures because of the fear of black ice for instance?

Commissioner Iscol: I will defer to Department of Transportation on road closures in terms of black ice. In terms of shutting everything down based on whether that's a decision that would be made at City Hall based on a number of variables and factors. And so with most weather plans, we have certain triggers that are built in. One of the complications with winter weather, unlike other events, is that there's other variables, time of day. Are you impacting a commute? Is it not a

commuting hour when the storm might hit? What's the validity of the forecast? What time of year it is? If it's coming into a holiday versus during a weekday or versus a weekend. So these are all things that need to be assessed by the leadership team here at City Hall in order to make those difficult decisions.

Question: (Inaudible.)

Commissioner Iscol: We are not shutting down bars or anything like that tonight.

Question: Where is the mayor?

First Deputy Mayor Grillo: Again, as I said earlier, the mayor has taken two days off, and in fact he has been participating in all of our meetings today many, many times.

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