

For Immediate Release

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COORDINATION FROM THE FRONTLINE: INSIGHTS ON INTERAGENCY EMERGENCY RESPONSE

June 25, 2020 – Brett Asher and McCharles Bouzy have offices that are a bit different than most. Their desks are black SUVs with tablets mounted to the center console surrounded by radio transmitters tuned to the FDNY, NYPD, and NYC Emergency Management frequencies. In their trunks, there is a medical kit, a wireless printer, and a drone. Asher is a 20-year veteran of the FDNY and a trained EMT. Bouzy is an NYPD lieutenant and has served in the Army for 20 years, currently as a reservist medic.

These are two of 20 Citywide Incident Coordinators (CIC) at the NYC Emergency Management Department. Most CICs are detailed to the department from the FDNY or NYPD. According to NYC Emergency Management’s director of field response, Wes Duskocil, an individual needs at least 10 years of frontline experience in New York City to become a CIC.

“Our incident coordinators respond to large-scale emergencies in the City,” **Duskocil** said. “We are there to work with the incident commander – whether that be a police commander, fire commander, or an engineer – to make sure each agency is talking with one another, and everyone has the resources they need to get the job done.”

Citywide Incident Commanders are a part of the field operations unit at NYC Emergency Management. Across three tours, the team of CICs responds to emergencies and coordinate field operations 24/7 in New York City. As the deputy director of field response, McCharles Bouzy works various hours in a given week from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. to cover multiple shifts.

“I love what we do at NYC Emergency Management. I feel like I am able to do things throughout the city that help people,” **Bouzy** said. “I’m still part of the NYPD and stay active in that work, but as a CIC it’s different, our job doesn’t end until the emergency is over and I like being that person. I like that New Yorkers can rely on me to help them through their toughest times.”



Citywide Incident Coordinator, McCharles Bouzy, working from his SUV

New Heights of Situational Awareness

Brett Asher is a drone pilot, one of only a handful of City workers authorized to fly in New York City. As a member of the FDNY's Command Tactical Unit, Asher helped found the fire department's drone program and was the first person to fly a drone during an active fire in [March of 2017](#). Later that year, he joined NYC Emergency Management and launched its drone program.

"I'm definitely pro-tech, that's for sure," **Asher** said. "When a lot of people hear the word drone, they either think nuisance or surveillance. I want to make it clear that in emergency responses our only concern is safety. Safety for our first responders and safety for those impacted by the emergency."

Asher has used his drone to identify hotspots and guide firefighter's movements during a fire. He has flown over unstable structures to help building engineers spot elevated weak points. During the 2018 steam pipe explosion, Asher's drone helped Con Edison identify which valves were failing, shutting the leak down at its source.

With COVID-19 Asher found unexpected utility in his drone's technology.



Citywide Incident Coordinator, Brett Asher test flying NYC Emergency Management's drone

When COVID-19 spread in New York City, NYC Emergency Management scaled up its operations as the agency's tasks grew in scope and project throughout the five boroughs. Turning the Javits Center into a large-scale field hospital was one of many projects with which Asher assisted.

"As we got ready to open the Javits Center, the biggest concern that was posted at one of the security meetings was screening – not for patients but workers. We had state, City, federal and private sector workers, about 3,000 people that had to get into this building every day," **Asher** said. "We needed to screen for COVID symptoms and the health department said they'd have to take temperature readings of each person every morning. The idea of using a camera was raised, and I realized I have a thermal imaging camera on the drone. So I went to my car, got the drone, set it on a table and we tested it. It ended up working perfectly."

Working with medical professionals, Asher was able to calibrate the temperature sensor in his camera to alert above a set point. If a person standing in front of the camera registered above a certain temperature, they were referred to an on-site nurse or doctor for further screening before entering the building. NYC Emergency Management only has one thermal imaging drone, but the team was as able to contact the FDNY and other New York State agencies to borrow more thermal imaging cameras, successfully allowing for multiple access points and rapid screening at the Javits Center.

“I’d never seen drone technology used that way before, I’m just happy I was able to figure it out,” **Asher** said. “Now we’re using thermal imaging cameras to screen people entering buildings at the fire department, the police department, at NYC Emergency Management and all over the city. I think it’s going to be an ongoing and developing practice going forward.”

Coordinating During a Pandemic

In addition to the Javits Center, NYC Emergency Management CICs assisted in setting up the field hospital at the Billy Jean King Tennis Center in Queens. The team completed over 280 checks of local food distribution centers, monitoring for possible food shortages during the COVID-19 pandemic. They visited truck stops around the city ensuring drivers had the resources needed to continue delivering critical supplies. In support of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, CICs visited every funeral home in the five boroughs and worked with funeral directors to coordinate additional resources for them as needed. CICs also visited every emergency room in the city and coordinated additional resources for strained hospitals.

“The job of a CIC is to respond to and help mitigate an emergency, so the lives of New Yorkers can get back to normal – or as close to normal as possible – as soon as possible,” **Doskocil** said. “Who knows when that will happen with a pandemic but we’ll keep at it until it does.”

NYC Emergency Management Citywide Incident Coordinators respond to about 1,000 emergencies per year in New York City.