

## Preparing New Yorkers for Terrorism and Other Disasters

*Sloan Foundation work enhanced disaster preparedness  
and biosecurity in New York, for New York.*

**A**lfred P. Sloan, Jr., was a New Yorker. He grew up in Brooklyn and attended the Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute until he graduated at age seventeen. He ran the General Motors Company from offices at 1775 Broadway at 57th Street, and he established the offices of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation at 630 5th Avenue in Rockefeller Center, one of New York City's most iconic landmarks. Sloan lived in a 5th Avenue apartment in the winter and summered on Long Island. The Sloan Kettering Institute for Cancer Research was established in New York in 1945 and was at the time one of the Sloan Foundation's largest grants (\$2.56 million).<sup>357</sup> It is in keeping with that commitment to the city that the Sloan Foundation funded a substantial

number of disaster preparedness and biosecurity projects that had the goal of improving civilian preparedness among New Yorkers.

That goal is important not just because of the geographic connection, but also because the city is a major target of terrorism. The World Trade Center was bombed in 1993 and destroyed on September 11, 2001. In 2001, letters containing anthrax were sent to news outlets in Manhattan. Other attempted attacks have been thwarted, including a car bomb in Times Square in 2010. The foundation's biosecurity grants in New York have served the dual purposes of responsible citizenship and helping a targeted city get prepared for bioterrorism.

In some cases, helping New York City prepare was a matter of introducing the right people to each other. This was the case on September 24, 2002, when then president Ralph Gomory and Paula Olsiewski hosted a dinner at the Rainbow Room in Rockefeller Plaza to introduce key members of the city's engineering community to members of the NYPD Counter terrorism Bureau. The police had been advising building owners who wanted to adjust their HVAC systems to reduce the potential effects of bioterrorism and they needed assistance. The engineers were happy to help. The Rainbow Room dinner helped the two groups get to know each other and provided a forum for exchange of ideas about ways to protect building occupants. After that introduction, the NYPD tapped the engineers' expertise for quite some time, and this area of work became one of the major components of the Sloan Foundation's biosecurity program.

Many other biosecurity programs and projects funded by the Sloan Foundation had their genesis in New York City and delivered national benefit, including the civilian MRC, now a program of the federal government and

celebrating its tenth year; New York University's InterCEP program, which devised incentives for widespread business preparedness; and SaTScan, the syndromic surveillance software developed by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

This chapter, however, focuses on Sloan Foundation work that enhanced disaster preparedness and biosecurity in New York, for New York.



## Are You Ready, New York?

### *The New York City Public Advocate's Ready Campaign*

After September 11, 2001, and the anthrax letter attacks, the public wanted more information about the threat of terrorism, about actions the government was taking to prevent additional attacks, and about measures ordinary people could take to protect themselves and their families. Despite the public's

YOUR FAMILY'S SAFETY  
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ARE YOU READY?

hunger for information, many public officials believed that if they told all they knew or suspected about the seriousness of the threat, public fear would increase, social disorder could

follow, and there would be political repercussions.<sup>358</sup> The reverse turned out to be true. After widespread reports on the anthrax letters, the *New York Times* reported that the US government was employing a “spin control”

model of public information release by not telling all they knew about the seriousness of the threat in order to prevent a panic, and, “as a result, public trust . . . evaporated.”<sup>359</sup>

Public trust in all levels of government was strained. Betsy Gotbaum, who at the time was public advocate for the City of New York, confirmed that New Yorkers complained to her about gaps in communication in the city, about not knowing what the city government was doing to protect them, and about not having the information they needed to protect themselves and their families if another disaster happened.<sup>360</sup> With Sloan Foundation support, she took action. In 2002, Gotbaum’s Preparedness Project for New York City published a printed guide and website to provide New Yorkers with detailed information about disaster preparedness.<sup>360</sup>

New York’s public advocate is an independently elected citywide official, next in line to the mayor—a powerful position in the city. The position was originally intended as that of ombudsman to help New Yorkers cut through red tape and gain better access to government. Thought of by some as a watchdog and by others as a pest, the public advocate has enough power to make a lot of noise about a problem and get results. In this case, the office pushed for community wide preparedness efforts from the New York City government, while also raising New Yorkers’ awareness of what they could do to prepare themselves for disaster. As part of that effort, in summer 2002 the office published and distributed more than 50,000 copies of a basic disaster preparedness pamphlet to provide city residents with detailed information about disaster preparedness, bioterrorism, mental health and disasters, and children and disasters.<sup>360,361</sup>

The success of those citywide efforts helped pave the way for the Sloan funded Ready New York campaign launched by New York City's Office of Emergency Management (OEM) in 2003. Ready New York was an extensive, city specific guide, available in seven languages, that provided information about weather disasters, fires, earthquakes, terrorism, radiological exposure, disease epidemics, and biological events.<sup>362</sup> The guide provided information for parents, families, seniors, and pet owners about preparedness and a variety of other topics, such as mental health. The OEM leveraged the work of the Ad Council and DHS by aligning its steps for preparedness with those in the federal guide, but the OEM tailored the city's guidance to meet the specific needs of New Yorkers. It was the first such guide that the city had produced since the 1960s.<sup>363</sup>

Now, almost ten years later, Ready New York is a much more extensive effort. In a 2006 editorial, the *New York Times* praised the program because it “anticipates an impressive list of potential emergencies, with clear, helpful, multilingual directions on how to prepare and respond.”<sup>364</sup> The project's website provides multiple guides and planning tools, videos, interactive maps for planning post disaster meet ups, and numerous other resources.<sup>365</sup> Preparedness guides are customized for a host of audiences and a host of disasters (floods, extreme heat, hurricanes, pandemic flu), and they are published in English, Spanish, Russian, Haitian, Arabic, Urdu, Korean, Bengali, Chinese, Polish, and French. The website reminds visitors that “your family's safety is in your hands,” and asks, “Are you ready?”<sup>365</sup>



## Teaching New Yorkers about Preparedness

### *World Cares Center Disaster Preparedness Fair*

In August 2004, New Yorkers' fears of another terrorist attack were heightened by the Republican National Convention, which was to be held at Madison Square Garden from August 30 through September 2. Terror alerts were frequent and security was dialed up, "temporarily turning midtown Manhattan into an armed camp."<sup>366</sup> During the convention, the more than 10,000 police officers armed with rifles and deployed by the city to secure the area were a conspicuous addition to the US Secret Service, DHS, and FBI patrols.<sup>366</sup> The ramped up security made people nervous.

Lisa Orloff, founder and executive director of the World Cares Center, confirms that even three years later, "people were still really angry about 9/11, the response, and the government's response."<sup>367</sup> Orloff's World Cares Center was formed not long after the 9/11 attacks by a group of New York City volunteers, who, according to the group's website, "saw a need to bring together various agencies and community based organizations in a safe and collaborative environment."<sup>368</sup> The group established two September Space Community Resiliency Centers "to promote social, emotional and physical healing for the entire responder community."<sup>369</sup> In 2004, as the city prepared for the Republican National Convention, Orloff's organization received many

calls and e mails from people asking for information, venting, and worrying about another terrorist attack.<sup>367</sup>

In response to the community's concerns, and with funding from the Sloan Foundation, the World Cares Center held the September Spaces Disaster Preparedness Fair on August 13, 2004, to help community members learn about the preparedness work that officials were doing on their behalf and about how to prepare themselves and their families for disaster. Speakers included representatives of the New York Disaster Council Coalition, Disaster Spiritual Care Services New York, Citizens for NYC, the American Red Cross of Greater New York, the New York Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, the OEM, and the police department.<sup>370</sup> Fair attendees received free "go bags" of emergency supplies and information that could help them survive a disaster. They also heard about World Care Center's PERCS program (PERCS stands for plan, educate, respond, collaborate, and support), which focused on volunteering and ways to prepare for the psychological effects of helping survivors.<sup>370</sup>

"Our efforts were to make sure that the general public was aware of what was going on, that they heard it directly from officials, and that officials were hearing concerns directly from the public. It was important to us and our mission for the center," explained Orloff,<sup>367</sup> who started the organization after her experiences volunteering as a supply chain manager at the Jacob Javits Center in the days just after the 9/11 attacks. Since then, the World Cares Center has grown under her direction from a 100 percent city volunteer organization to a national organization that promotes collaborative disaster preparedness and recovery among community members and official responders.<sup>369</sup> The World Cares Center has built on the experiences of

running the September Spaces Community Resiliency Centers, which served more than 45,000 people in the first six years of operation to become a source of expertise in spontaneous disaster volunteer management.<sup>369</sup>

Thankfully, New York City has not seen another attack like 9/11. Nonetheless, the World Cares Center continues the work of connecting people with public officials for information, as with the Disaster Preparedness fair, and helps officials manage volunteers during disaster response. The center has provided local leaders in twenty seven states and two countries with just in time training on managing volunteers in disasters, and when Hurricane Irene hit New Jersey in 2011, they provided just in time training for more than 1,000 community volunteers and coordinated other relief organizations to “muck out” and remediate 595 homes.<sup>367,371</sup>



## Sampling the Environment

### *The NYPD Increases BioWatch Effectiveness*

New York City was the first US metropolitan area to receive BioWatch, the federal environmental monitoring system intended to detect pathogens in the air that would signal a large bioterrorist attack. The BioWatch program was announced in President Bush’s 2003 State of the Union address and was installed in New York only months later.



The monitoring system places air sampling units where they will collect air particulates on a filter. The filters are collected and exchanged daily and analyzed for the presence of bioterrorism agents at the New York City Public Health Laboratory.

BioWatch has a number of limitations as a monitoring tool, but perhaps the most critical is the delay: Once filters are gathered from the monitors and analyzed for the presence of pathogens, it could take days before a “BioWatch Actionable Result” is detected. Patients may arrive at a hospital well before BioWatch has warned of an attack. Newer generations of BioWatch detectors require less time for sample analysis, making it possible that information signaling an attack could be acted on more rapidly.<sup>372</sup>

In 2007, the NYPD requested support from the Sloan Foundation to conduct a citywide needs assessment and requirements analysis for environmental monitoring of pathogens. The goal was to maximize the effectiveness of the BioWatch system by helping the NYPD determine the best locations for six new automated detector units. Richard Falkenrath, then NYPD’s deputy commissioner of counterterrorism, and colleagues asserted in a proposal to Sloan that “automated systems are the future, as they can do air sampling and lab testing in the field, delivering testing results in near real time, and cut down on cost and labor intensity.”<sup>373</sup> They made the case that the city of New York could not wait until federally developed next generation systems became available. Sloan’s grant allowed them to do the best they could with the technology available.



## Training Building and Service Workers for Terrorism Response

### *New York Safe and Secure Training Program Curriculum*

“He can chat about the weather, deliver urgent packages, and help you when you’re locked out. But can your doorman keep out Al Qaeda?”<sup>374</sup> So opened a June 24, 2002, *New York Magazine* article about a new program to train building service workers to recognize and respond to terrorism. The course, called NY Safe and Secure: Restoring a Sense of Well Being to the Citizens of New York City, provided instruction through the Thomas Shortman Training Fund on behalf of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 32BJ. The Sloan Foundation funded curriculum development, which was a collaborative effort of the city’s police and fire departments, OEM, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, and the Realty Advisory Board in partnership with the Real Estate Board of New York and the Council of NYC Cooperatives and Condominiums.

In a 2004 *USA Today* article announcing the program, NYPD Commissioner Raymond Kelly explained its logic: “The police and the building service workers are natural allies. . . . Both work around the clock, both are in the business of protecting people. This program gives us a powerful network of eyes and ears on the street.”<sup>375</sup> The course strove to

break terrorism down into “a combination of crimes that target civilian populations,”<sup>376</sup> crimes familiar to doormen and other building service workers who have had to deal with rapists, robbers, and burglars. The specialized antiterrorism training helped refine the skills they had and taught them observational skills and how to effectively describe a perpetrator to the authorities.<sup>376</sup>

Training was completed initially by 28,000 doormen, superintendents, and porters in 3,500 New York City apartment buildings. Off duty police academy

CAN YOUR DOORMAN  
KEEP OUT AL QAEDA?

instructors taught the four hour session on how to spot and respond to potential terrorist threats.<sup>375</sup> Mike Fishman, President of Local SEIU 32BJ, told *New York Magazine*, “We’d like to be the third leg, after fire and police. We’re in every building. . . . We’d like to coordinate citywide procedures like evacuation plans, even checklists on how to look for terrorist behavior.”<sup>374</sup> Years later, NY Safe and Secure is still offered in the course catalog for the Thomas Shortman Training Fund, which provides free academic and training courses for building service workers who are eligible members of their SEIU Local 32BJ union.

