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## Quackenbush Warehouse Fire-Paterson Department Today

**John Tippett**

So, Chief, let's open up by telling us a little bit about yourself and talk a little bit about the Paterson Fire Department for us.

**Fire Chief Brian  
McDermott**

Well, my name is Brian McDermott. I'm the fire chief for the City of Paterson Fire Department.

We have 442 employees here. We're within a city of 8.704 square miles. We're about 170,000 people. We're the second most densely populated city in the country of 100,000 population or more, behind New York City. It gets more dense by the by the year, which means we get busier by the year. Out of that, we have 370 Firefighter EMTs and all perform firefighting and emergency medical duties out of seven firehouses: seven engines, three ladders, and our rescue truck. And we have seven full time ambulances, along with our tour commander, deputy chief, and our three battalion chiefs. So we have on duty with that. We also run the fire communications division, which runs the fire and police communications for the city. That's about 52 employees with our director of communications. We also run OEM and, of course, our Fire Prevention and Education Bureau with our fire marshals and our fire educators. And we perform arson investigations. We're all hazards approach to the response throughout the city and the area.

And part of that is we don't think of our response just as being within Paterson. We're part of the Urban Area Security Initiative, where we perform with the Metro Urban Strike Team, which is, our strike team members of a 660-person force of First Response, Urban Search and Rescue would. And we've activated on quite a bit.

Our department was one of the early responders to 9/11 at Ground Zero. We had our Engine Company 5 on the scene providing almost first water to extinguish fires in the area. And we also had about 70 of us, including myself, that responded there that day to assist our brother and sister firefighters.

**Fire Chief Brain  
McDermott**

In New York City throughout the years Paterson has been, really, I almost, and I hate to use these words, but it's true, as a fire factory. We're known throughout the country for the intense mill fires that we've had throughout the years. And the fires that we continue to have. Although I can proudly say that we've cut our fire load in over half throughout the years. We've done so through very aggressive inspection, intense education to our children and our adults, identification of vacant and abandoned buildings.

And one of the things that we've done was, we did a unique program throughout the country. We actually have an excavator, a lowboy, and a roll-off tractor trailer, too, with dumpsters, and we perform emergency demolition of vacant and abandoned buildings. And we're also expanding that into tearing vacant, abandoned buildings down pre-fire.

Throughout the years, I've been to thousands of fires, and I can tell you the majority have been with a two and a half story, two, three and four story wood frame buildings. Starts in a vacant building and goes into to occupied buildings. Now we have three abandoned buildings, and it seems that they were multiplying over the years.

So, we've turned into that to being one of our most aggressive, both legally bringing attorneys into the mix security, bringing DPW into the mix and boarding these buildings up. And of course, through our intense program to try and draw these buildings down to the ground. And we've seen over the years that this has made a difference through our attorneys.

We've done quite a bit to force owners to rehabilitate their buildings. We've dropped from approximately 3500 vacant the abandoned buildings that we had the height while I was here, while I was a young firefighter to now, we're roughly in the 500 range. So that's really that's probably the key thing that we did to reduce fires within the city.

And aside from that, we are going through the exact same scourge that everybody else is, with heroin, where we are issuing Narcan multiple times daily. We were, if you noticed in the past, we were part of the Live Rescue Program on TV where in one hour's time we had 12 overdoses.

And that seems to be intensifying as fentanyl gets more powerful and we've put in things to and programs to try and curb it. We have our opioid response team, where we go throughout the hotspots in the city and try to garner support with along with a police officer and a social worker to get them counseling and pull people off the street. We've done about.

**Fire Chief Brain  
McDermott**

800 interventions so far in about five months, and we're also doing a medically assisted treatment program using suboxone. We're the first in the country doing that.

So, we pride ourselves here in being progressive. We are not, of course, we respond to fires, but we try to get ahead of things here in a city that has been plagued by everything – still shootings, stabbings, fires. Our arson is down to almost nothing which used to be probably 70% of our fires. So, through aggressive enforcement and prosecution of those that commit arson, we've really making that dent.

So ,we're very proud of the work that we do with the men and women here. We went through COVID, which was, I can tell you, as a chief, especially chief with emergency medical services, has been the most draining time of my life. But I can tell you, the most proud moments of my life and watching our staff do just amazing things. And, you know, and in March of 2020, we started with the unknown. We went into the unknown, just like so many of our other brothers and sisters throughout this country, risking ourselves. And we did a what, I believe, was a marvelous job and I'm so proud.

And I kind of, you know, I talk so much because I'm so proud of the work that we do in such a needy city. But even in this needy city with all the shootings and all the horrors that we've witnessed, I've met the most beautiful, wonderful people, the most caring people, and built the most generous collaborations towards the people of this city. And that's a little bit about the city.

It's also, historically, it's almost considered the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution and unionization. And we have the 77-foot Great Falls that are the second-highest falls this side of the Mississippi. It's a great tourist destination if anybody ever wants to see it and learn about Alexander Hamilton and the Mill Districts that we have that were driven by hydroelectric power. And it's a very unique, unique place and just with such incredibly deep history. And I could not be more proud to be the chief here. I'm the 11th chief in the 207-year history of this department dating back to 1815 and it's such an honor.

**John Tippett**

Well, thank you, Chief. Appreciate that.