

## An Introduction to Emergency Communications

**What is a communications emergency?** - A communication emergency exists when critical communications infrastructure is damaged or is overloaded.

- a) Violent storms or earthquakes
- b) Underground cables dug up
- c) Vehicles knock down poles
- d) System failures
- e) Chemical or nuclear accident

What emergencies might occur in Portales or Roosevelt County?

### Day-to-day communications versus emergencies

- a) normal communications infrastructure is rapidly overloaded by the increased demand that results during an emergency
- b) amateur radio operators have the equipment to contribute additional communications capacity in a very short time
- c) hams are often asked to organize and coordinate emergency communication networks with little or no warning
- d) emergency stations must be portable and be able to set up and become operational quickly
- e) amateur radio operators must develop the skills, knowledge, and teamwork to communicate effectively in an emergency
- f) emergency communications happens in real time, and cannot be delayed for convenience
- g) unlike regular ham activities, emergency communications involves both amateurs and non-amateurs
- h) hams may need to interact with several key organizations simultaneously
- i) hams will be required to contact specific stations or locations to pass important information or messages quickly and accurately
- j) emergency operations have no schedule and may continue for several days or longer

What other attributes might separate day-to-day activities from an emergency situation?

### The mission

- a) communicating is job #1
- b) think of the best and fastest way to send information
- c) you should be prepared to communicate using any means available
  - i) fax or telephone if available
  - ii) ham radio, cb, gmrs, frs, murs, cell, marine
  - iii) shoe leather express
  - iv) smoke signals
- d) your operating and technical skills are just as important as your ham radio resources

What other methods could be used to send or exchange emergency information?

### **Anatomy of a communications emergency**

- a) In the early phase of many situations, there is no immediate need for emergency communications. This phase might include a program like “Storm Watch”
- b) When an actual communications need develops, a “served” agency will put out a request for volunteer communicators. Operators and equipment might be needed at an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) or field location.
- c) In some situations, a “rapid response team” might quickly deploy a minimal response, to be followed by a second, more robust response several hours later.
- d) A logistics net might be set up to handle incoming volunteers and equipment, and to direct resources where they are needed most.
  - i) staffing an emergency shelter
  - ii) shadowing officials to provide communications
  - iii) passing health and welfare messages between separated family members
  - iv) communicate logistical needs for the Red Cross, police, fire, hospitals
  - v) collecting weather information
  - vi) damage reports
- e) Once communication operations begin, many things can happen:
  - i) the number of messages can grow quickly
  - ii) relief or replacement operators may be needed
  - iii) the need for food, water, sleeping accommodations, batteries, fuel
  - iv) replacing failed equipment, antennas
  - v) nets can be initiated, re-arranged, and dismantled as needs change
  - vi) operators can be requested or released as the situation changes
  - vii) after the emergency, the emcomm group should review the effectiveness of the response
  - viii) a review can be conducted on a formal net, by email, or face-to-face
  - ix) properly conducted critiques can greatly improve future effectiveness

### **What makes a good emcomm volunteer?**

- a) A desire to help others without personal gain
- b) The ability to work as a member of a team
- c) Take direction from others
- d) The ability to think and act quickly under stress and pressure

What other personal attributes might contribute to being a good volunteer?

Have you experienced personal behaviors that detracted from a team activity?

**Where do you fit in?**

- a) Ham operators have been a communications resource ever since there has been radio
- b) Certain technical and operating skills are critical
- c) Hams have the equipment, technical skills, and the frequencies to create expedient and effective communications networks under poor conditions
- d) Having radios and frequencies is NOT enough - emergency communication skills are very important and very different from daily ham activities
- e) You can easily become part of the problem rather than part of the solution

What equipment and/or skills do have that could contribute to emergency communications?

Are there behaviors that can disrupt or adversely affect team effectiveness?

**What you are not.**

- a) You are not a first responder
- b) You have no authority, you are not in charge
- c) You do not need flashing lights, sirens, badges or uniforms
- d) There are limits to your responsibilities
- e) You cannot make decisions for others
- f) You can decide whether to participate or not
- g) You can make decisions affecting your own health, safety or welfare

**REFERENCES**

ARRL Public Service Communications Manual

ARRL Amateur Radio Emergency Communications Course, Level I, Third Edition