

## “Readiness”

As we look at the extensive knowledge, skill and equipment requirements for providing an effective Emergency Communications, we find many operators with significant experience gained years, or even decades, ago. We ask “What types of emergencies were encountered?” and “How much of that expertise is still applicable to our current situations and needs?”

Floods, forest fires, earthquakes, tornadoes and hurricanes haven’t changed much over the years, and previous experience from those events can be invaluable today. On the other hand, is there anyone amongst us, who in their wildest dreams could have envisioned New York City on September 11, 2001, or Hurricane Katrina? I doubt it, but this new category of disaster painfully demonstrates the new challenges, requirements and issues that we, as emergency communicators, will need to be ready to deal with. Other issues involve significant changes in equipment, Emergency Communications techniques and our served agencies expectations.

While some of the equipment and practices used years ago are good, the 70s techniques and equipment are probably not adequate to handle all of the Emergency Communications requirements today. Equipment, modes, procedures, protocols and techniques have advanced far beyond what we could ever have dreamed of in 1970. Our served agencies now reasonably expect us to adapt and evolve to accommodate and overcome new challenges. Served agency expectations have expanded far beyond what got the job done in 1970. We need to understand and conform to the Incident Command System (ICS) and the follow-on National Incident Management System (NIMS). They reasonably expect our communication capabilities and techniques to have evolved. They presume our people are accustomed to functioning well with law enforcement, fire, Forest Service, FEMA and disaster relief organizations.

Simply put, what was good enough and got the job done in 1970 is now less than adequate to support ARES/RACES Emergency Communications today.

## **Basic Training:**

Back in the 70's there were many Emergency Coordinators that used the teaching techniques like "dump them in the deep end so they will learn to swim". Fortunately for all of us though, those who learned the hard way, and are still active, really appreciate the expedience of well documented process and procedures.

One of the more notable examples of training material is the ARRL's Amateur Radio Emergency Communications Course (ARECC). Developed largely by sixteen volunteers and then reformatted and embellished by the ARRL's staff, it has grown into an education vehicle for both new-comers and the more seasoned veterans alike.

What do you actually learn from these processes and procedures? The basics of true communication and how to interact successfully with the Amateur Radio team and even more importantly, how to interact with the Served Agency. One radio operator has no one to talk to! It is only when you learn to successfully work with your team that you become part of a communications unit. This unit then learns to work with the Served Agency in a productive manner.

## **On-going Training:**

On-going training is the easiest and least painful way to hone the skills you have and allow you to build new ones. How much training are you going to require? That depends on how much previous training you have had and how often you have reinforced that training. This is one place where more is better.

Many people believe that checking into a weekly net is sufficient, I do not. Think about how many weekly nets require you to do more than give your call, name and indicate if you have comments or an announcement. Very few! How does that provide actual training? It does not. It is only when you are required to convey the maximum information, using the fewest words, consistently, that your communication skills are expanded.

Hams, in general, tend to talk rather than communicate. It is only when you force yourself to summarize your thoughts and present that summary in a clear and efficient manner that you actually progress as a communicator.

### **“We always got the job done”:**

While “we always got the job done” MAY be true, let’s look at two versions of how that can happen. Scenario: You have a brain tumor that multiple doctors agree completely will kill within three months if it is not removed very soon. Doctor “A” removes the tumor and after the recovery time you live but have constant pain, need help to move around the house, have trouble forming words, and are constantly confused. Compare that with Doctor “B” who removes the tumor and after minimal recovery time you have no pain, think more clearly than you have in years, move about better than you have since you were a teen, and generally feel better then ever.

In both cases the doctor could easily say “we got the job done” because you lived, but which doctor would you want to have doing the operation? Clearly the second example, but why? Simply because he provided the service that produced the best possible results, not the minimum acceptable, but rather the maximum positive results.

### **Emergency Communications:**

We can no longer take the attitude of “I’ll be there when I’m needed” paired with “been there done that” because anyone that does, short changes not only the emergency services within Amateur Radios ARES/RACES and Skywarn, but the needs of our served agencies. We need to foster attitudes more in tune with “I’ll keep my training current, expand my knowledge AND have fun!” Then, we serve every one’s needs.

How do we go beyond “good enough”? Simply by taking the attitude of Emergency Communication as a job we would get paid for, rather than something we do to fill time. Like the doctors in the example, good enough is not really good enough. It is only when we consistently exceed served agency expectations that we

become “unpaid professionals.”

Remember, **Amateur Radio is the hobby, Emergency Communications is a commitment!** Are you willing to make a commitment?