

# “CHARACTERISTICS OF DISASTER RESPONSE”

## (Though provokers)

Emergencies are normally taken care of on a local level. By definition, anything that is beyond the capabilities of the local services or severely impacts the local emergency services requires outside help. As well, disasters often cross local jurisdictional boundaries. This means that you will have multiple organizations and volunteers all responding at the same time. You have no idea what that means until you see it! The following are a series of events that will happen:

1. First, there will be a convergence of Responders. Everyone and their dog comes running. This includes off-duty, retired, probationary, volunteer, fired and wanna be personnel.
2. Following this group will be the convergence of Organizations, Red Cross, Salvation Army, church groups, Disaster Child Services, SPCA, ARES, RACES, CERT.... Dozens or hundreds of organizations will arrive.
3. Convergence of Media and local outlets are augmented by regional, national and international media looking for unique stories.
4. Convergence of Relatives and especially if children are affected, every relative will come looking for missing family members.
5. Convergence of Volunteers, emergency services will be overwhelmed with something they rarely allow otherwise with the addition of volunteers.
6. Convergence of Equipment and Supplies, because the exact needs are unknown, supplies will be ordered approximately three times more or three times less than what is actually required. The lack of information on the scope of the disaster, the numbers of people affected and the most severely affected areas means that supplies will be poorly allocated.

7. Convergence of Spectators will interfere with the responders trying to reach the scene.
8. **"Who is in charge"** becomes a major issue. Legal requirements, multi-jurisdictional devastation, multiple agencies, conflicting priorities mean much time is spent initially picking the top person or much more time will be spent debating and working against one-another.
9. Situation reports are given infrequently and are not updated.
10. Emergency organizations may know that their situation has changed, but they rarely advise outside organizations, agencies or the public because they never do it on a regular basis.
11. Rumors start in the absence of reliable government or response agency information. Spontaneous sources of information will spring up in the absence of a widespread, easily accessible official source of information. Emergency services will turn to these ad-hoc sources because they too are not getting all the information they need.
12. Logistics issues become huge. Not only does the over, or under, supply of scarce resources create problems, but the transportation issues become huge. Which roads are blocked? What bridges are out? What streets are gridlocked by fleeing evacuees and responding agencies and relatives?
13. Logistics issues become huge with the allocation of scarce resources.
14. Who gets the ten generators when there are thousands of needs? The hospitals? The reception centers? The fire halls? The water supply? The gas stations to supply fuel for the fire trucks? The utility companies? The Red Cross? The Amateur Radio operators?
15. Financial issues are ignored until later. There is an attitude in the disaster response of "someone will pay for this."

## NATURE OF AMATEUR RADIO

Amateur Radio has a nature that makes it extremely useful in disasters. It also has a nature that makes it extremely un-useful in disasters. That's because a lot of the folks in Public Safety do not know what Amateur Radio is or does.

Amateur Radio never has to physically converge; if you have one ham "on the inside" everyone else can monitor and stay out of the way until needed.

Amateur Radio is dispersed, which helps with the damage assessment and defining the exact boundaries or scope of a disaster.

Amateur Radio is less likely to be forced off the air because it has equipment redundancy, alternate power supplies and is willing to take as many car batteries as required to keep communications going.

Amateur Radio is not tied to the specific locations, agencies, types of disaster and can be flexibly used for multiple types of disaster.

Don't wait to be called. Even if you are told not to respond, you can still prepare your group and monitor the situation. It is better to gear up fast and then stand down rather than to wait until being called and working from a catch-up position.

Send one person to the EOC or calling agency. This requires you to have a working relationship with the government and served agencies.

If the disaster is widespread and Amateur Radio is dispersed, use Amateur Radio to assemble a systematic and thorough report on what areas are affected.

If the disaster is widespread and Amateur Radio is dispersed, expect that Amateur Radio will be unable to move easily due to blocked roads, traffic congestion or damaged bridges.

Just like the emergency services may be equally affected as the general population, so will Amateur Radio. Repeaters may be working or out-of-service. Be prepared

to use both simplex and repeater.

Get into digital communications. The more you can do here, the more useful you will be in a disaster. If volumes of traffic are an issue for all disaster response, then voice messaging no longer cuts it 100%.

Use a formal and complete incident Command response including organization, objectives, terminology and operational periods.

Have a set of SOPS to help each person to do their job.

Use non-hams to assist. They can do member callout, logging of net traffic, writing situation reports, updating other clubs, covering for bathroom breaks, providing logistics support, timing situation reports, taking pictures.

Be flexible! Disasters are never what you thought they were going to be.

## **OTHER GENERAL COMMENTS ABOUT DISASTERS - FOR THE FUN OF IT**

Things happen faster than you can react or think about.

Things don't work and things go wrong.

There are no right answers, especially when information is unavailable or incorrect.

Any decision you make will be determined by others, who were not there, to be the wrong decision.

Evacuating a city is like moving it over 10 miles and then having everyone say, "Okay, we moved. Now you must supply everything to us and take care of every single problem we have."

Lessons learned are "lessons listed" rather than anything people learn.

Backup generators fail. Over half of them fail in the first 24-48 hours.

Some problems are not solvable.

Rumors start in the absence of reliable official information.

It takes a while to get organized.

Key people will be missing, out of touch, out of region, or dead.

If you don't know the key people, you won't be allowed in to the emergency response. If they know you, they will let you in.

Most people don't learn from disasters. People in tornado alley don't all have tornado cellars and people rebuild in floodplains.

People don't have 72-hours of supplies and expect the government to provide everything in that period that might be required.

People are unrealistic in what they expect the responders to do.

Reception centers or evacuation centers are the last place people want to stay and will be completely empty unless it is the only available place to stay (at which point it becomes full to overflowing).

No matter how many frequencies you have, you can only listen to one or two at the most. Emergency organizations wanting more frequencies will still experience communications failures.

The media may be the only source of reliable information because the municipal information representatives are spending too much time massaging and spinning the limited information they have.

All decisions made in this situation risk being the wrong decisions.

If you wait to be called, you will likely never be called because they have too many other issues or can't find your number when they finally do want to call you.

