

“What it Takes to be Ready”

Dealing with the “bureaucracy” or “red tape” of government emergency management organizations and agencies at any level, can often be very frustrating. The only thing worse is dealing with untrained volunteers who think they are indispensable during a disaster and trying to explain the shortcomings of your group to the served agency.

The largest problem that Amateur radio has had in the past, according to most served agencies, is Ham radio operators that go into an event and try to take over and run things are tell the served agency what it is they need to do or how they should do it. A “know it all” attitude usually caused from a lack of training and/or experience could cost lives, but at the very least it cost the group an image of a professional group.

Planning and training are an absolute necessity before a disaster occurs. On the job training when a disaster strikes is the absolute fact of life, but it’s the wrong time to learn about the basics of emergency communications, and such an approach can be a separate disaster in itself.

All participants who provide their emergency communications skills should be well trained before they should work for any organization or an agency in charge of an incident. Knowledge of the types of communications support required during an event and practicing skills according to the emergency support plans will go a long way to enable emergency communicator’s to do their jobs quickly and effectively and help to minimize the loss of life and property, as well as the reputation of the group.

The role of amateur radio operators during an emergency is to provide communications support. Our sole purpose in providing emergency communications support is to send and receive information in an accurate and timely manner. This is our only function. We are not there to provide emergency management or coordination.

The skills necessary to participate as an emergency communicator are not difficult, but we need to practice them so they become second nature especially since they must usually be preformed under stressful conditions. So, to ensure that we maintain our communications skills for an emergency, we, as amateur radio operators need to take part in practice sessions or drills. I would suggest that each EC hold some sort of field training sessions at least quarterly using a schedule that you and your members can live with.

Marathons, Walkathons and other public service events are excellent training methods, providing you treat them as a training event, by having a debriefing at the end of the event and talked about what was accomplished, what went right, what went wrong and how to correct it, and any other conflicts or resolutions. Formal training is extremely valuable as it teaches us to form important habits that can and will help avoid future problems.

To this end, we might ask ourselves, have I done what I takes to be ready?