

## *What today is considered “Good enough”?*

As we look at the extensive knowledge, skill and equipment requirements for providing effective Emergency Communications we find many operators with significant experience gained over their years. We might ask “What types of emergencies have they encountered?” and “how much of their expertise is still applicable to 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 in 2005? I doubt it, but these categories 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, techniques and served agency expectations.

While some of the equipment and Emergency Communications practices used years ago are good, the 60's, 70s, 80's and even some of the 90's techniques and equipment are probably not adequate

to handle all of today's Emergency Communications requirements. Equipment, modes 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 some people are saying and that is "We have always got the job done, why do we need change". 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.

The Emergency Managers of today reasonably expect our communication capabilities and techniques to have evolved. Simply put, what was “good enough” and “got the job done” in 1970 is now less than adequate to support Emergency Communications today.

Two more attitudes that we often hear and I take exception to is “I’ll be there when I’m needed” paired with “been there done that”. The people that say this are actually saying that they are not willing to take training; they are unwilling to commit themselves or their equipment and really think training is a joke. These may be “Strong words” but they are true and also accurate words. Anyone that believes or says these things short changes not only the emergency services within Amateur Radio, 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 still have fun!” Then, we serve every one’s needs.

So, how do we go beyond “good enough”? Like the doctors in the above example, good enough was not really good enough was it. On going training is the

easiest and least painful way to get by this and in doing so we hone the skills we already have and it allows us 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. 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.

What you do in spending time in training for Emergency Communication is to establish that you have made a commitment. That commitment is what distinguishes you from those that say “Been there done that”, “I’ll be there when needed” and “We always got the job done”. Anyone can key the microphone and babble. Anyone can grab a microphone and run a Billy-Joe-Bob red neck babble net. To participate in or run a true communication net, it takes training and practice. Training and practice you do not get in our normal day to day enjoyment of our hobby.

If you ever want to go into an EOC or anything else beyond the very basic evacuation shelter, the agencies we serve now REQUIRE training so they know, or at least have some assurance, that you know what the (Blank) you are doing. No training, no access and that is the way it is now.

Remember, Amateur Radio is the hobby, Emergency Communications is a commitment! Are you willing to make a commitment? An Amateur Radio License does NOT make you a communicator but training helps.