

## Preparedness

EMCOMM members should exemplify preparedness. Without it the other phases of Emergency Management; response, recovery and mitigation are empty words. How prepared are you? Have you created and discussed your Family Disaster Plan at home? Do you have a first aid kit, flares or reflectors, water and a fire extinguisher in your vehicle? If like most, you don't have these items in your go kit now, there may be some work to do. Hopefully, this program will give you some ideas.

Do you have a plan? As EMCOMM members, we must plan not only from the perspective of Emergency communications but also include our responsibilities to our communities and families. Have you talked with experienced members to gather their perspective? Have you joined the Arkansas ARES/RACES Yahoo group or other groups that share the same Emergency Communications theme? Listening to real life EMCOMM experience can save you a bunch of time and money. Most folks will be happy to share their lessons learned, if you will ask. They have; "been there and done that". Experience is a great teacher for most people.

Knowing what to do, where to go, how to get there, and knowing how to notify everyone where you are and if you are o.k., should be the framework of your family plan. If family members are at work or school and can't get home, they need to know a safe place to go and how to let other family members know where they are and if they are safe. If your family ever does need to evacuate, the process is much less upsetting when everyone knows the plan. You must plan especially for young children, elderly relatives, anyone with special medical needs and family pets.

Have you practiced your home exit drill? Do you have a prearranged meeting spot close by and one long distance in case of an area disaster? Does each member of your family know how to dial 911 and give accurate information? Have you printed a contact sheet for each member of your family? Does each member of your family know how to shut off the electricity, water, gas or other utilities in case you are required to be evacuated?

Does each member of your family have a go pack with flashlight and batteries, clothing, personal medications, sanitary supplies and comfort items? Have you assembled a sturdy watertight family kit with your information, critical papers, food and water and other necessary items in case you are required to leave home in a hurry?

Now let's talk a bit about your communications plan. My first question is; does your communications plan involve repeaters? If it does, and that is your primary plan, it is time to stop and rethink the problem and at least make a plan B. You should consider it a happy accident if your repeaters are functioning after a major disaster. Even if your repeater survives the direct strike, loss of commercial power will certainly claim many repeaters after the 12 hours or so it takes to drain the backup battery systems. Then, how will you communicate? Are you familiar enough with your radio to reprogram it without the manual, or at least have the plan preprogrammed ahead of time? Are you familiar with simplex operation and the frequencies you will be using?

Can the radio you are relying on provide a good enough signal for you to stake your life on? If you have an HT as the center piece of your EMCOMM radio plan, you might have more work to do. Sure there are times when an HT is a handy tool to have, but for most EMCOMM work, you will be better served all around with a good dual band 12 volt mobile radio with selectable power outputs.

Are you prepared to operate off grid? What this means is how long can you operate without commercial power? You may say I have a generator I don't need to worry about it. I will share this been there done that lesson. Last year the northern part of the state was covered with ice. At my home, many were without power for three weeks. Many folks had generators. Problem was that gas stations couldn't pump the gas they had because they were without power as well. That has stayed with many of us and I have my radio room where I can operate off grid for several weeks. Does everyone need to do that? Probably not, however folks should have other batteries as back up and think of a way to recharge them. One way is to use a solar panel and there are several other methods that can be employed depending on your situation. These technologies are available and becoming more cost effective every day. Ed N3QL, has done a great amount of work on this question and I am sure if you have questions on the subject, if you will contact Him, he will be glad to share with you what he has learned.

The natural next question would be what is your antenna plan? Think about this and remember that it is better to have a real good antenna with gain than a more powerful radio. You will likely turn the power level down on your radio in order to increase your transmit time and save your power capacity. When you do this, your antenna choice becomes more important. Does it take a monstrous effort and a league of people to erect your antenna plan? Will you rely on trees? Think gain and installation in your choice of an EMCOMM antenna.

Finally, are you ready to participate? Do you know how to handle formal traffic? When was the last time you actually handled formal written traffic? If you do not handle traffic regularly you will probably have some kinks to work out before it becomes second nature for you. The problem is that people will be depending on your skills from the beginning and dealing with emergency or priority traffic is not the place to learn. There are two parts to message handling; the sending and the receiving. Are you proficient with both?

Luckily, there are several ways you can learn to handle traffic without the stress of the live environment. One way is through this Net , Beginning May 24th, Tom K5WTH will begin a series of training programs titled "Learning the National Traffic System using the K.I.S.S. Method", covering how to properly send and receive formal written traffic. Tom's program will be each Monday Night for several weeks. ASTEN will have programs each night to complement this valuable training through exercises as well as question and answer sessions. Your goal may be to learn to send formal written traffic for your served agencies. Maybe you are an old pro and just wish to add your valuable experience to the discussion. Either way, I hope you will make plans to be a part of this important series. Tonight's topic of preparedness is a truly an endless topic and one that

has many dimensions. I look forward to your comments and experiences and I hope this program has in some way been helpful to you.