Appendix A: Case Studies
Case Study – Part 1

Some of the members of two local amateur radio clubs in Columbia County have been talking about putting their “toys” to good use for the benefit of the community. A few of them talked with friends, who are Sheriff’s deputies, about volunteering their time to help with communications during emergency situations and community events. They were told that emergency management officials would handle communications in-house with trained professionals, particularly during a serious event.

At an emergency planning meeting, one of the Sheriff’s deputies mentioned that the hams and “CBers” wanted to get involved. The Director of Emergency Management told the group that a friend from the Midwest had said they had tried to use hams in a weather monitoring program there, but “the hams were reporting tornadoes that weren’t there.” Someone else said, “Volunteers don’t ever get their programs off the ground.” The idea was quickly dismissed, and the group proceeded to the next topic.

Discouraged but not defeated, the amateur radio operators talked with the administrator of the local hospital. While the administrator offered them an opportunity to participate at the annual fundraiser, he discouraged them from expecting to play a major role in real events. “After all,” he said, “real lives are at stake here.” The hams got similar responses from the Fire Department, Police Chief, and others.

Though disappointed by the less-than-enthusiastic responses, the club members decided to participate in the hospital’s fundraiser, a 5k “fun run.” The hams saw it as a way to start proving their worth to the community. They offered to go with the response teams that would be driving the route during the race so they could relay information back to the command post in the event of a medical emergency. Instead, they were directed to set up a station and broadcast results of the race while asking for pledges. Months went by with no additional opportunities for community involvement, and the membership numbers of both clubs dwindled.

Discussion

- What assumptions are made by emergency management personnel about amateur radio operators?

- The emergency managers confuse amateur radio with CB radio. What are the differences?

- If it’s true that hams were reporting tornadoes that weren’t there, how could that situation be prevented?
Case Study – Part 2

Some of the hams contacted the State RACES officer but learned that the State’s involvement in the RACES program consisted merely of a roster of names and stale addresses. There were neither programs nor exercises. The RACES officer was friendly and sounded supportive, but he lacked the funding, time, and resources to follow through with any meaningful help.

Over the next several months, the clubs’ numbers continued to decline, and the remaining members felt defeated and deflated. It seemed no one wanted their help. Then one day, a new member named Dave Marley asked to call a special joint club meeting to address both groups.

Dave had recently moved to Columbia County. Before that, he had been actively involved in an amateur radio group in his hometown. Full of enthusiasm and knowing that hams could do an effective job, he presented a talk on what hams had done in his hometown. His group had provided communications for many community events and for the local authorities during a variety of emergencies. Dave’s enthusiasm was infectious, and he soon had a group of more than a dozen others who decided to hold regular meetings and learn what they could about the skills they would need in order to provide effective service.

When they contacted the Director of Emergency Management for help in planning their training, she told them not to waste their time. Encouraged by Dave’s confidence, they refused to give up, and they based their training program on what Dave had done in his hometown. They also formed an ARES group, so they would be registered for communications duty if a disaster strikes.

Eventually, their offer to help with the County’s Pioneer Days parade was accepted. They did a good job and successfully summoned help for a heart attack victim by using a repeater and autopatch equipment that they had built and installed on a nearby mountain. As the months went by, they did more public service events and became more proficient. The ARES group’s membership swelled as they became more active, and the local newspaper even ran a short series of articles on the group, including an interview with Dave Marley.

Discussion

- What challenges do the ham radio operators face when trying to get involved and offer their services during emergencies?
- How are those challenges overcome?
- Besides technical training, what kinds of training do amateur radio operators need to effectively assist with community events and emergencies?
Case Study – Part 3

Although the ARES group in Columbia County was becoming more and more active and participated in many community events, for several years they were still not included in the planning efforts of the county’s Emergency Management Agency. Then, an event happened that caused the community leaders to see the true value of amateur radio operators during emergencies.

A private plane carrying a well-known doctor and his entire family crashed in a rugged, remote, heavily wooded canyon area. A winter snowstorm closed in, and the search effort was initially hampered by extremely poor communications between the many agencies responding. Dave Marley, who was now the club president, called the Director of Emergency Management and offered the help of his volunteers, but she said that the situation needed to be handled by “professionals.”

Several hours later, a highly respected Congressman who happened to be the father-in-law of the missing doctor, visited some of the responding agencies. The agencies reported that the search was being complicated by a lack of effective communications. After a long, uncomfortable conversation with the Congressman, the Director of Emergency Management called Dave Marley.

Within two hours, hams were stationed with the Sheriff’s Jeep Patrol commander, the Civil Air Patrol mission coordinator, the National Forest Service supervisor, and with many of the ground teams. By evening, communications were being relayed quite effectively from the search scene in the deep canyons to the Command Post in town. The next day, the five victims were found. Unfortunately, they were all dead. It was later determined that the family had survived the crash but had frozen to death in the storm. Community leaders agreed that the victims would have had a much better chance of survival if the responding agencies had been able to communicate effectively with each other from the beginning of the search.

After this event, the Director of Emergency Management became a firm believer in the amateur radio volunteers. Recognizing the potential value of hams as a communications resource, but well aware of the critical need for effective training and organization, she met with Dave Marley to discuss the problems she had observed during the event. During this meeting, she agreed to include the group in future training. As the volunteers became more proficient and organized, they were included in more and more events, as well as planning efforts. At the request of the Director, Dave Marley set up an amateur radio station in the community’s Emergency Operations Center. The amateur radio volunteers became a valued and vital part of the agency.
Discussion

- What can you do to convince others in your community that amateur radio operators should be included in emergency planning and response efforts?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of establishing an amateur radio station in the EOC?
Case Study – Part 4

With the sponsorship of the Columbia County Emergency Management Office, the amateur radio operators established a RACES group. Working together, the Emergency Management Agency and the members wrote a RACES plan to establish standard operating procedures for operation of RACES in the event of an emergency.

Discussion

Review the sample RACES plan included in Appendix D of your Student Manual. (Your instructor may direct you to review a different plan instead.)

Discuss the questions below:

- What are some components of the sample RACES plan that you particularly like?
- Consider the needs of your community. What would you need to include in a RACES plan to accommodate those needs?
Case Study – Part 5

Columbia County has made substantial efforts to incorporate amateur radio operators in its activities, using them for actual responses. The volunteers have proven their worth time and time again. For example, when the fire department repeater system failed, the hams’ repeaters were used. The second year the amateur radio volunteers participated in the annual fundraiser for the hospital, a runner collapsed during the race, and the ham operators called for help. The volunteers have also participated in community exercises such as disaster drills. In recognition of the volunteers’ contributions, “Honorary Citizen” awards were conferred on each of the members who had participated in events, and the group as a whole received an engraved plaque.

Now, the amateur radio operators are actively involved in providing communications assistance not only for agencies throughout the county, but also with the State Emergency Management Office. They are assisting in the development of the State’s RACES program and helping grow similar programs in other counties, providing training and technical resources. The State coroner’s office has also provided specialized training to selected members of the group who now form the communications component of the coroner’s mass casualty response team. In this role, the hams’ ability to provide communications between agencies that otherwise do not have frequencies in common is particularly useful.

Amateur radio has provided essential communications and eased the overload that otherwise would have burdened the in-house communications resources of response agencies during many serious events, including floods, hazmat incidents, hostage situations, and forest fires. The Columbia County Director of Emergency Management now says she doesn’t know how they ever survived without amateur radio’s involvement.

Discussion

- What are the factors that contributed to the ultimate success of the amateur radio operators’ involvement in emergency management?