

News Release

For Immediate Release

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Hams Prepare for Irene

Getting ahead of a hurricane

Newington, CT 23 August 2011 – Amateur Radio operators (often called "hams") up and down the East Coast are being watchful as Hurricane Irene approaches. Their volunteer emergency radio skills may be needed very soon. For 75 years, their ARES program, part of the ARRL, the hams' national association, has provided communications for many emergency response organizations. As Hurricane Irene grows stronger and comes closer, it looks like they will be needed again.

Amateur Radio operators already activated the Hurricane Watch Net (HWN) for Hurricane Irene -- the first hurricane of the 2011 Atlantic hurricane season – on Monday and now are preparing for her arrival this weekend. The volunteer radio hobbyists are supporting the National Hurricane Center staff with surface/meteorological reports from stations in the hurricane affected areas using ham radio's worldwide emergency capabilities.

ARES has formal agreements with FEMA, the American Red Cross, the Salvation Army and many state and local emergency operations centers.

Amateur Radio operators have an impressive history of serving in disasters when other communications systems failed, were destroyed or were overloaded. Now hams up and down the East Coast are checking batteries, testing radios and antennas, finalizing plans made with local emergency responders, and placing themselves in "standby mode." If the phones, Internet and other systems fail or get overloaded, the radio hams know they will become critical in getting information in and out of Irene's disaster area. "We are not first responders," said Allen Pitts of the ARRL. "We're the people behind the curtain that make the heroes look good." The services provided by volunteer Amateur Radio operators were life saving in Hurricane Katrina, the Japanese tsunami, Haitian earthquake, 9-11 and dozens more disasters.

As Craig Fugate, head of FEMA, stated on May 11th, "When everything else fails, Amateur Radio is often our last line of defense.... When you need Amateur Radio, you really need them."

For more information about Amateur Radio in emergency uses, go to www.emergency-radio.org###