

News Release

For more information:
Allen Pitts, W1AGP
ARRL
Apitts@arrl.org
860-594-0328

“Hams” Test Emergency Communications

Sept. 27, 2011– The backup emergency communication skills of Amateur Radio operators, often called “hams,” are being tested around the country as Amateur Radio operators conduct their annual Simulated Emergency Test in October.

Using emergency powered radios and working with local agencies, the hams will have only a few hours to create extensive radio communications networks which can be used should there be a failure or overload of normal services like phones or the Internet. The hams’ ability to get “on the air” quickly is a critical need following major incidents. In addition, the ham radio operators provide “interoperability” – they pass information between the many government and volunteer agencies which are needed in disasters but often have incompatible communication systems.

This year the Amateur Radio operators will be replicating events ranging from hurricanes and tornadoes to terrorist actions and practicing to restore critical communications as fast as possible for emergency operations. The hams have the slogan, “When all else fails – Amateur Radio works.” According to Allen Pitts of the ARRL, the national association for Amateur Radio, “The hams of take that quite seriously. To us it is both a fact and a promise. The ARES[®] program, the Amateur Radio Emergency Service, has agreements to provide aid to FEMA, the American Red Cross, the Salvation Army, National Weather Service and hundreds of emergency operations centers around the country.”

Amateur Radio volunteer operators around the country respond to many calls for aid each year. They provide their services and equipment freely to their communities, saving both lives and thousands of dollars for neighbors. They are “Amateurs” only in that they are not paid, but their service in a disaster can be priceless. As FEMA Director Craig Fugate remarked, “When you need them, you *really* need them!”

Despite the Internet and cell phones, interest in ham radio is growing rapidly in the US. There are now 700,000 FCC Amateur Radio licensees in the USA and over 2.5 million worldwide. They are able to get and share information, locally or world-wide, without depending on other systems. Hams can not only send voice or code messages, but also emails and digital messages when there is no Internet. During Hurricane Irene, the hams were critical in providing immediate, ground-level reports to the National Weather Service. After the storm, hams continued to provide help in the many flooded communities and areas that lost electric power.

###

What do Amateur Radio operators do during and after disasters?

Amateur Radio operators set up and operate organized communication networks locally for governmental and emergency officials, as well as non-commercial communication for private citizens affected by the disaster. Amateur Radio operators are most likely to be active after disasters that damage regular lines of communications due to power outages and destruction of telephone lines.

How do Amateur Radio operators help local officials?

Many radio amateurs are active as communications volunteers with local public safety organizations. In addition, in some disasters, radio frequencies are not coordinated among relief officials and Amateur Radio operators step in to coordinate communication when radio towers and other elements in the communications infrastructure are damaged.

What are the major Amateur Radio emergency organizations?

Amateur Radio operators have informal and formal groups to coordinate communication during emergencies. At the local level, hams work with local emergency organizations and can create area-wide networks of wireless communication called “nets.” At the state level, hams are often involved with state emergency management operations. In large events, hams operate at the national level through the Amateur Radio Emergency Service® (ARES) which is coordinated by the American Radio Relay League (ARRL) and its field volunteers. In addition, in areas that are prone to severe weather, many hams are involved in Skywarn® spotting with the National Weather Service.

Is Amateur Radio recognized as a resource by national relief organizations?

Many national organizations have formal agreements with the Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES) and other Amateur Radio groups including:

- Department of Homeland Security - Citizen Corps
- Federal Emergency Management Agency
- National Communications System
- American Red Cross
- The Salvation Army
- National Weather Service
- Association of Public Safety Communications Officials

To Learn More:

The best way to learn about Amateur Radio is talking to hams face-to-face. To find out how to get started and who to contact in your area, call or write:

The American Radio Relay League, 225 Main Street, Newington, CT 06111

Telephone 1-800-32 NEW-HAM

www.Emergency-Radio.org