

Expanding Our Client Base

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Throughout our history, we radio amateurs have provided valuable public service in time of need. Prior to World War II, our service passed health and welfare traffic following many different types of calamities, both natural and man-made. Even during the period of "radio silence" brought about by WW II, amateurs found ways to be of assistance to their fellow citizens.

In the years following the war's end, and especially since the mid-1970s, amateurs, principally through the ARRL-sponsored Amateur Radio Emergency Corps (now the Amateur Radio Emergency Service), greatly expanded their public service/public support role. Most of our "clients" have consisted of government organizations such as police and fire departments, hospitals, and other emergency medical service providers. Some, on the other hand, have been private sector humanitarian groups with a need for communication help following a major event.

Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), close working relationships, a respect for our capabilities as emergency communicators, and the reliance of thousands of public safety agencies on us for communications assistance resulted. This "official" support helps us retain our frequency allocations, fight overly restrictive antenna ordinances, etc. Recent passage of a congressional resolution supporting Amateur Radio was due at least in part to the positive reputation we have established as emergency communicators on behalf of the clients we serve.

Logic, coupled with an understanding of political reality, tells us that future official support will continue to be based on both the perception and reality that we are a valuable emergency communications resource. For us to remain such, in my opinion as both an amateur and public safety official, it will be necessary to expand our present base of clients. For reasons to be explained, in many parts of our country, particularly in the larger urban centers, the long-standing need for our services by police, fire, and emergency medical providers is diminishing. For us to maintain our presence in the emergency communications role will require seeking out and affiliating with new, previously unserved entities. And this is why I believe that to be the case.

In the larger urban centers in particular, public safety communication systems (such as those used by police and fire) have become extremely sophisticated. Using state-of-the-art technology, public safety now has

access to redundant, multimode communications services. No longer is the big city police department restricted to a handful of FM voice-only radio channels. Through "target hardening," sites are less susceptible to failure, even in major regional catastrophic events such as earthquakes, floods and hurricanes. As but two examples, but very significant ones, of how police and fire agencies in the major urban centers are becoming virtually self-sufficient from a communication perspective (and thus less in need of Amateur Radio assistance) I offer the following.

In both the Northridge earthquake, which affected three large, populous counties, and the Southern California fire storms of 1993, which affected eight populous counties, law enforcement and fire agencies themselves handled the heavy load of communication on their own frequencies, using their own equipment. Certainly, amateurs did play an important role in the response to those events, but little they did was in direct support of police and fire. That marked a radical departure from previous similar events. This is repeated in other population centers of our nation.

If, then, my theory is correct, and public safety agencies are less and less dependent on us—yet we still need "official" support for our hobby in years to come—the question becomes one of how to gain that support. The answer is relatively simple: Expand our base of clients (or "served agencies") to a pool that is limited only by our imagination.

Who needs our services and why? What new clients can we serve that will be valuable as well as appreciated? Here is a list of just a few:

Public Works Departments

Cities, counties, and other government entities operate public works departments that maintain roads, buildings and, in some cases, water and sanitation systems. Public works departments are important responders to major disasters. More and more often they are used to assist public safety agencies with what is called "heavy" or "urban" rescue. In the Northridge earthquake, public works equipment and personnel outside the affected area were brought in to assist with debris removal and demolition of damaged and unsafe structures. Public works organizations typically have bare-bones radio communication systems. Often those are single-frequency systems and usable only within their home jurisdiction. When summoned under "mutual aid" to respond to different locales, they are often without usable communications. Yet, they need communication if their efforts are to be coordi-

nated with those of other emergency responders. Filling that communication role for them is an appropriate activity for the Amateur Radio Emergency Service.

Utility Companies

Water, power, and sanitation agencies fill a critical role similar in many respects to that previously attributed to public works. As a general rule, the only public utility entity with sufficient, far-ranging, and reliable communication equipment is the telephone company. All others, particularly when operating out of their home territory, could clearly benefit from Amateur Radio assistance.

Transportation Companies

Both public and private transportation providers, principally bus companies, are often used to transport injured to medical treatment centers or evacuees to shelters. Coordination is essential so that those transported arrive at the proper place and at the proper time, and so their dispatch and arrival can be confirmed. Again, Amateur Radio can provide the two-way radio communication essential for proper assignment and use of transportation resources. Some publicly owned bus companies have radio communication, but many do not. Most privately operated buses, such as those used to transport school children, have no radio communication at all.

The use of portable/mobile packet equipment can also permit the in-route documentation of who is being transported, when and where. This constitutes a much-appreciated resource when attempting to reunite evacuees with loved ones. The evolving technology of Automated Packet Reporting Systems, a location identifier similar in some respects to the Global Positioning Service (GPS), offers the ability to track the location and progress of evacuations as they are occurring.

Hospitals

There are already in place excellent examples of Amateur Radio assistance to hospitals during disasters. Orange County, California, has had an inter- and intra-Amateur Radio emergency communication system operational for many years. As an example of how valuable such amateur support can be, consider this: The Northridge earthquake seriously damaged or destroyed dozens of medical facilities in Los Angeles County. Many patients needed to be relocated out of county—many to Orange County. The Amateur Radio network among Orange County hospitals played an important role in coordinating this large-scale relocation effort. In most parts of our country,

hospitals have little, if any, communication support. Amateurs who may provide communication assistance to such facilities will earn for our hobby not just the support of hospital administrators and staff, but the appreciation of patients and their friends and families as well.

Convalescent Centers; Homes for the Aged

Such facilities are similar in many respects to hospitals, with two critical differences of importance to us: (1) It is extremely rare for such facilities to have any communication at all, other than regular telephone service. (2) A much higher percentage of residents of such facilities are nonambulatory than is the case with the average hospital. Do such facilities need communication assistance to coordinate patient care and patient movement following a disaster? Absolutely! This is a fertile area for Amateur Radio involvement!

Last, for purposes of this discussion, are two types of facilities that clearly require communication assistance following a disaster—schools and child care centers, if occupied at the time of the disaster. While some schools, particularly in large districts, do have two-way radios for internal (on-campus) communication, few (if any) have a more extensive communication capability. In over 28 years as a law enforcement officer, having served in many jurisdictions, I have yet to see a child care facility with any communication equipment at all. Following a regional disaster (the Loma Prieta earthquake in the San Francisco region in 1989 serves as an excellent example), literally thousands of children, some only months old, can be isolated in care facilities and schools. As happened with Loma Prieta, the parents could be stranded perhaps as much as 50 miles from where their children might be. And, with telephones inoperable, those parents would have no means of determining whether or not their children were safe. Anyone who has ever experienced even a brief, unscheduled separation from their child can appreciate the near panic that results. Imagine the support for and appreciation of Amateur Radio that would result from having in place health and welfare nets to feed information from schools and child care centers to a central point, such as a Red Cross headquarters, where parents could check for information.

I have suggested just a few of the many potential new/expanded clients that ought to be sought out by the Amateur Radio Emergency Service and other similar groups that provide public service communication. There are parts of our nation where seeking new clients will not be necessary for years to come, since a sophisticated level of public safety communication in those areas is decades away. But, for many of us, the need to affiliate with new served agencies is now. Devoting your efforts to such pursuits is clearly in the best interest of our hobby.

The Tuesday Night Net

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The show started promptly, led by a living legend. "This is Alfa Foxtrot One Bravo Delta India, AF1BDI, No Traffic, Over." Those words, in that order, complete with well-placed throat clearings, signaled the official start of the 9 PM Tuesday evening Air Force MARS net. Rarely did we miss a night, and frequently there would only be two of us; a new-to-ham-radio 15-year-old Technician, and an elderly, patient gentleman with a deep, booming, resonant voice. The long-distance relationship over the air lasted over two years. Two-meter AM was the norm. Were we ready to try those new-fangled FM radios? Naw—it was more fun to practice using AM rigs with slope detection to hear repeaters. Two-meter AM, two miles apart, and two lives whose only point of intersection was every Tuesday at 9 PM.

"Roger AF1BDI. Welcome to the net. Looks like it's just the two of us tonight, Ed. Over."

I'd say that with one eye on the grid meter, making sure my current was within specs. It wasn't an easy task, running that old 6½-foot-tall WW II AM transmitter while it laid flat on its side in my basement (it wouldn't fit standing up!). It called for some unusual microphone calisthenics, while flipping switches and reading meters, head cocked sideways. I could only wonder how gravity would affect horizontally mounted picture-tube-sized finals. Heck, this was the 70s, not the 50s, but how else could a kid get on the air for next to nothing?

"Good Evening, Jack, not much traffic for the net tonight, is there?"

Of course, neither of us bothered to mention that there rarely, if ever, was much traffic. But the conversation was great. Listening to his signal conjured up images of a tall, statesman-like figure sitting behind an impressive array of equipment on a large desk. I'd longed for the day when I could afford that kind of setup, even without ever having seen it. His voice and manner exuded ham radio. One Saturday, after much prodding, a friend and I hopped on our three-speeds and biked to the address I had so carefully researched from the phone book. We knew right away which house it was—the beams on his roof surpassed any mental images I had ever had of them. In my eyes, no less than the eighth wonder of the world. My life was complete!

"No sir, Mr. Handy. Not much traffic tonight. You have a fine signal. How is my signal? Over."

His signal was always booming. Mine was always marginal. In fact, he would frequently relay my check-in to net control, even though his QTH was twice the distance from net control that mine was. He'd attribute that phenomena to RF shadows, but we both knew my station was line of sight to all the others in that part of the Connecticut River Valley.

The informal part of the net was the main event. Invariably, he would take his turn in the roundtable—booming, eloquently, and unendingly. I was always so grateful, since his long-winded comments left little time toward the end of the allotted one-hour net period for my remarks. I could never think of anything to say, anyway. Very frequently, after his soliloquy, I found myself trying to summarize his observations, to no avail. He had the mark of a master ragchewer, I thought. How many years of practice does it take to get *that* good? If we needed even *more* time, we'd QSY to the ham band, where W1BDI would expound even further on the state of radio, or my signal, whichever came first.

What I didn't realize then was that I was experiencing the ultimate introduction to Ham Radio—and I was fortunate enough to ragchew with the best Elmers one could have: Ed, Jim (the net manager), Mike, Paul and others who would drop in at 9 on Tuesday night. No question on operating procedure or rules and regs would ever go unanswered.

It wasn't until years later that I realized that I had communicated with a legend. When I was finally forced to clean out my parents' cellar, Jeff Bauer, WA1MBK, graciously offered to take my old 2-meter AM boat anchor. As we gingerly pulled its massive frame out of the cellar, I mentioned the memories of those nights, and my regular sked with W1BDI. Jeff's eyes lighted up as if I had just said that I had broken bread with The Almighty himself. "You mean Ed Handy, W1BDI? You knew Ed Handy? Did you know he was one of the originals at the ARRL?" No, I didn't. "Passed away a few years back. He was the sole author of the first editions of the *Radio Amateur's Handbook*, which was nicknamed 'Handy's Handy Handbook' when Ed introduced it." Somehow it came as no surprise. I now realize that the attention he gave me as he approached the twilight years of his life was one small piece of the larger puzzle. His life, to the end, was dedicated to the growth of the hobby, and masterful guidance of new hams.

"Roger, AF1BDI. We'll log you off the net. Thanks for checking in and 73, OM."

(Ed Handy, W1BDI, served the League for over 42 years, including a long tenure as Communications Manager, and later, Vice President. He was the founder of many programs, including the ARRL Field Organization, Field Day, the November Sweepstakes, the Amateur Radio Emergency Service and the precursor to the MARS system. He was "Mr ARRL"—indeed, "Mr Amateur Radio"—to hams who spanned several generations. Ed passed away November 10, 1981.—K1CE)

(About the author: Jack Santos, AA1FH, was licensed in 1970 as WA1OBI.)

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