

**Introduction to Emergency Communications
Virginia- SouthBears
By
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Thanks for your interest in providing emergency communications in support of the Southern Baptist Convention in their response to disaster. When disaster occurs one of the first systems to fail is that of communications. This is true of public broadcasting, public service radios (police, fire, rescue, hospitals etc.) and other agencies. This can be due to infrastructure damage (loss of towers, electricity, microwave dishes or other equipment damage.) This can also be due to system overload. The trunking systems that have been designed to bring repeater sites to a higher level of utilization become a liability when disaster occurs because the level of capacity needed may overwhelm the available resources.

The communications resources that we all have come to rely upon can disappear in a moment of time. This includes telephone, cell phones, and the Internet. This may be caused by infrastructure failure or because the system has been overwhelmed by high demand and just shuts down.

When major disasters occur Amateur Radio has become known as the system that works “when all else fails”. Part of the reason is that in many situations Amateur Radio is setup following the disaster and is prepared to use emergency power sources they bring to the scene. Another plus for Amateur Radio is the wide range of frequencies and modes that can be brought to bear on the communications need at hand. It is vital when Amateur Radio resources are rushed into the void that they are well trained and committed to the task. Many years of participation in Amateur Radio doesn’t always prepare the ham for the specialized needs of supporting agencies and people in times of disaster.

If you are a long time ham, it doesn’t hurt to brush up on your skills and become better acquainted with the demands and expectations of today’s world of emergency communications. If you are a new ham, just obtaining that license doesn’t prepare you for the high demands and pressure of operating in an emergency situation. It has been found that as many as 50% of new hams never “key a microphone or get on-the-air.” A disaster situation is not the place for you to begin making your first on-the-air contact. I would suggest that as soon as you receive your call, that you contact a local ham. It may be a club member or a fellow member of SouthBears and ask them to work with you in getting comfortable with Amateur Radio communications. Some clubs have equipment they loan to new hams. Many older hams have a number of spare rigs and they are willing to loan one to new hams and assist them in getting on the air. You may want to make a simplex contact on your first few QSOs. This way, you don’t feel the whole world is listening. Some clubs have club stations that are available for new hams to use to build confidence and

operating skills prior to trying to participate even in an emergency drill. After getting on the air, begin to check into local nets and then once you feel a level of confidence move on to regional and even national nets.

You may take all the courses that you like and even pass related test but if you fail to get involved with hands-on experience it is unlikely that you will arrive at a comfortable level of working with actual disasters. The long-standing members of SouthBEARS need to enlist the help of new hams in setting up communications trailers and systems. It is much easier to operate a system that you helped to setup. It would be good to make these trailers available during nets to allow members to get acquainted with the equipment and systems and understand their operation. All nets that call themselves “Emergency Nets” need to provide some level of trailing during the net session. Otherwise they become little more than a “rag-chew net” and their value allows participants to understand how to check into a net and become aware of how net discipline works (to transmit only when recognized by net control and be given permission to make a call). True emergency nets need to do more toward on-the- air training

Over the next few weeks I plan to write eleven additional chapters for training purposes on this site. I plan to make it as practical as possible and allow it to address the primary mission of supporting the goals of SouthBEARS rather than be a general emergency communications course. There are a number of good courses that are available along with excellent books that can be purchased on this subject. One source of these books is the ARRL course book on emergency communications. These are ARECC Level I, Level II and Level III. These books can be found at <http://www.arrl.org/catalog/index.php3?category=Public+Service+and+Emergency+Communications>.

Following disaster there are many ways that we can serve. Many of us that are no longer able to mud out a house or use a chainsaw may still make major contributions on behalf of Christ and the church. One of these is emergency communications. If you are willing to earn an Amateur Radio license, train and be available for service you can become a valuable asset.

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