

# Operation Wildfire

## Summary for October 1, 2011

Operation Wildfire was an emergency simulation with the impact area being located in the southern part of Carroll County, Virginia. This was a simulation involving the loss of most communications throughout the Carroll County area with the phone exchanges of 228, 236 and 730 being down. The public service equipment located on Beamers Knob was also lost to this simulated wildfire that engulfed most the mountain top, along with many acres to the west of Beamers Knob. This simulation was designed to test the Amateur Radio resources within the county and the region to respond and bridge the gap for the needed communications requirements to fight the fire and to evacuate and care for those citizens that would have been in harms way. Joining in this effort were ham radio operators that were supporting the following agencies as they supported Carroll County.

These agencies were; the National Weather Service in Blacksburg along with their Skyward resources, Rural Retreat Rescue, Wytheville Fire, Woods River Chapter of the ARC, Roanoke Regional Office of the ARC, the New River Valley ARC, the Carroll County EOC, Cana Rescue, the RACES Radio Communications Trailer stationed at Beamers Knob, Rockingham County NC EOC, Rockingham County NC ARC, Floyd County EOC, Pulaski County EOC, Montgomery County EOC, Franklin County Department of Public Safety, Franklin County Shelter, Carroll County Search and Rescue, and the Baptist Disaster Relief Communications trailer located in Newport News VA.

During this simulation, hundreds of messages were exchanged to provide up to date weather information, progress of the fire and the procurement of needed resources to house and feed those displaced by this simulated disaster. This communications was ongoing for the 4 hour period of the exercise and spanned a distance of about 350 miles west to east and over 100 miles north to south. Both digital text messages were being sent as well as voice communications, all by radio and in some cases with radios interconnected to the Internet. Where there was a break in Internet service, radio was used to span that gap and reconnect email services on each side of the downed Internet service in a seamless fashion. There was about 42 ham radio operators registered that participated in this drill along with a number of agency staff. The cost of this exercise was zero dollars to any agency.

With the heavy volume of messages being sent and received, there were some “bottle necks” that we became aware and these will be worked on as time continues. Some of these were equipment related and others were human related. Continued training and drills of this type will allow us all to be more prepared for major events that can affect any area. We want to thank repeater owners Junior Diamond, N4VL and Mike Fariss, K4EZ for the use of their equipment in the drill. We wish to thank agency staff for

taking time on a weekend to be part of this exercise and we want to thank all the hams throughout the region for sharing their talents and time to make this drill possible.