

## Attitude and Emcomm

Waller County ARES training material used with permission from Christine Smith, N5CAS.

A person having just completed basic training as a fire fighter is not going to be expected by the public, his peers, or his superiors to be as well suited to all aspects of the job as one who has undergone additional training above the basic level. Field experience added to on-going training is what makes a good firefighter. Why then is it that many of the Amateur Radio fraternity feel that having an operator's license automatically makes them an asset to public safety communications? Unfortunately this attitude is held by many amateurs and is an example of something in need of change. A driving license grants one the privilege of driving upon the public streets and highways. It does not entitle the driver to drive a heavy truck for hire. It is the requirement of on-going training and experience that produces a qualified operator.

Nothing in the course of study from the Technician to Extra Class Amateur License makes anyone an emergency communications expert or even an asset to the public safety. Unless a person is willing to undertake on-going training and thus gain experience and to subject themselves to accepted standards of conduct and discipline, the license serves only as minimum requirement for operation. In matters of emergency communications, this means you are expected to know far more than just how to hook up and use a radio transmitter and antenna. You must also know how to communicate using the minimum number of words; operate in a directed net - without slowing the net yet without being in a hurry, something of how to conduct yourself concerning sensitive communications, dealing with the press, your limitations as well as your assets.

If you expect to be dumped into the middle of a forest fire to provide emergency communications to professional and volunteer fire crews, then you had best also know at least the basics of fire fighting, and how it relates to your own safety, that of the public at large, and the other members of the team. In short, you may think you are the best communicator in the world, but if you expect to be placed in the thick of it, you might want to know which way the wind is blowing!

Before you begin the technical material involved in learning about Emergency Communication (EmComm) it is imperative that you understand your knowledge in EmComm is not actually as important as your attitude, during emergencies. Yes, technical ability will enable you to do a far better job of communicating. But your attitude will determine the success of the overall Amateur Radio effort. The person who brings a "know it all" or "Cowboy" attitude will only hamper relations with served agencies.

The people you will be **servi**ng - remember that word - are professionals that have seen far too many people more interested in impressing someone than in getting the job done. You will actually impress them far more by being as quiet as you can and doing your job well. Results, without interference of served agency people, will cement relations with your served agency.

Simply stated, **EmComm requires an explicit mental commitment to help others.** Please read that again. A commitment to help others. To be effective in EmComm you will be required to expend significant effort and time in training and practice. Many say "I did that before, so I don't need to practice". This is not true. It will take time, a lot of time, if you are to be successful. If you are willing to spend that time, **WELCOME!**

Hams are patriotic, independent people and they are volunteers. The attitude among a few hams is that 'Volunteers don't have to take orders.' That's absolutely correct. We don't *have* to take orders. But if you are not ready to follow instructions, *you may want to do something outside of ARES/RACES.*

*Do not adjust, play with or fiddle with any piece of equipment in use for an event, during that event, unless it is malfunctioning. Remember, an incident scene is not about radios and being a Ham, it's about the incident and YOU will either be part of the problem or part of the solution.*

### **What is a Communications Emergency?**

The easiest way to think about a communications emergency is to begin by using the definitions used in the [Incident Command System \(ICS\)](#). "We will define an incident as any planned or unplanned occurrence or event, regardless of cause, which requires action by emergency service personnel to prevent or minimize loss of life or damage to property and/or natural resources." We can see that during a large scale event it would be possible to have enough information (traffic) flow that the emergency service communications could become overloaded to a level that it would fail to function as required by the incident.

### **What defines a communications emergency?**

When normal communications processes are inadequate to handle the information flow required to service an incident as defined in the ICS

### **What role does Amateur Radio serve?**

Our primary role is to support the emergency management community (responders, relief and recovery agencies) with communications during times of emergency and disaster when normal communications are unavailable or overwhelmed.

### **We are NOT a rapid response team.**

If you arrive at the scene of an emergency just as the sirens are quieting, keep your mouth shut and get out of the way! We do not provide first aid, transport victims, provide traffic control or any other function normally provided by public service agencies. We DO provide communication when public service systems are overloaded. Even the SKYWARN group does not activate until the National Weather Service has requested our help.

Many operators think of ARES/RACES as a simple extension of the "talk time" in the hobby. This is not true. ARES and RACES are organizations that continually need more trained operators that are willing to learn to communicate rather than just talk. It is not that the trained operators are willing to learn to communicate. It is that the trained operators have learned to communicate accurately, in a timely fashion, regardless of the obstacles in the event. Unlike general amateur radio activities, emergency operations happen in real-time. Things can not be delayed. Emergency communicators are looking for specific stations to contact NOW to pass traffic. **Teamwork, not competition between stations,** is imperative.

Emergency communications involves both amateurs and non-amateurs alike. Emergency communicators must have the equipment, skill and knowledge to improvise additional communications capacity in very short order. **In all of this, leadership, teamwork and initiative are key factors to success!**

### **Who runs the event?**

When you are working any event please understand that you are there to help the served agency with a communications shortfall. This, in and of itself, is embarrassing to some agencies. If you keep that fact in mind, you can eliminate confusion and problems by acknowledging that the served agency runs the event. Not just by your words, but by your actions!

The largest problem that Amateur Radio has is operators that go into an event and try to take over. Cowboy and "wanna-be" behavior WILL discourage the served agency from ever using Amateur Radio services again. In some cases it has resulted in the Amateur Radio operator involved being arrested and removed from the scene.

Most if not all Public Service agencies use some form of the Incident Command System (ICS) as the model for operations during an emergency. You will help your served agency and your ARES/RACES group if you understand how the ICS works. The recommended ICS FEMA training is listed on the Harris County ARES Web Page under FEMA. You should work through this training if you have not already done so.