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Backgrounder: Amateur Radio Emergency Communication

What do Amateur Radio operators do during and after disasters?

Amateur Radio operators set up and operate organized communication networks to assist local 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, cellular and other infrastructure-dependent systems.

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; Amateur Radio operators 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 may participate in local emergency organizations, or organize local "traffic nets" using frequencies that work well for local communication. At the state level, hams are often involved with state emergency management operations. In addition, hams operate at the national level through the Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES), which is coordinated through the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and through the Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES), which is coordinated through the American Radio Relay League and its field volunteers. Many hams are also involved in Skywarn, operating under the National Weather Service and provide emergency weather information to the NWS for analysis and dissemination to the public.

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
- Salvation Army
- National Weather Service
- Association of Public Safety Communications Officials

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What are some examples of emergencies involving Amateur Radio?

- Illinois Tornadoes 2015
- Texas/Oklahoma Flooding 2015
- Akron, Ohio 911 outage 2015
- Nepal Earthquake 2015
- Arkansas Tornadoes 2014
- Moore, OK Tornado 2014
- Nevada Flooding 2014
- Oso, Washington Landslide 2014
- Wildfires in Texas/New Mexico - 2013
- Typhoon Haiyan - November 2013
- Colorado Flooding - September 2013
- Boston Marathon Bombing - April 2013
- Moore, OK Tornado - May 2013
- Hurricane Issac 2012
- Superstorm Sandy 2012
- Japanese Tsunami 2011
- Joplin Tornado 2011
- Southeast Tornadoes 2011
- Virginia Earthquake 2011
- Hurricane Irene 2011
- BWCAW Fire 2011
- San Diego Blackout 2011
- February tornado outbreak - 2008
- Oregon Storms - 2007
- Hurricanes Katrina and Rita --2005
- Earthquake in Central California -- December 2003
- Northeast blackout -- August 2003
- Shuttle Columbia recovery effort -- February 2003
- World Trade Center and Pentagon terrorist attacks -- September 2001
- Flooding in Texas and Louisiana (Storm Allison) -- June 2001
- Fires in Los Alamos, New Mexico -- May 2000
- Hurricane Floyd -- September 1999
- "500-Year Flood," Grand Forks, N.D., and East Grand Forks, Minn. - April 1997
- Western U.S. floods - January 1997
- Hurricane Fran - September 1996
- TWA plane crash - July 1996
- Oklahoma City Bombing - April 1995

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