

# Backgrounder: Amateur Radio Emergency Communication

## For More Information:

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### **What do Amateur Radio operators do during and after disasters?**

Amateur Radio operators set up and operate organized communication networks locally for 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 and Amateur Radio operators step in to 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 VHF (very high frequencies) and UHF (ultra high frequencies). 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)<sup>®</sup>, 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 the government and national relief organizations?**

Many government agencies and national organizations have formal agreements with the Amateur Radio Emergency Service 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
- American Red Cross

In addition, regional and local ARES units have formal agreements with local and state agencies and organizations.

## **What are some examples of emergencies involving Amateur Radio?**

- Ice storms December 2008
- February tornado outbreak - 2008
- Oregon Storms - 2007
- Hurricanes Katrina and Rita - 2005
- Hurricanes Charlie, Frances, Ivan, and Jeanne in Florida - 2004
- Severe weather in Virginia - May 2004
- Tornadoes in Illinois - April 2004
- Earthquake in Central California - December 2003
- Hurricane Isabel - September 2003
- Northeast blackout - August 2003
- Midwest tornadoes - May 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
- Hurricane Mitch in Central America - November 1998
- "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