

# A Better Prepared Amateur Radio Response

**H**ave you been listening to or reading the comments of the homeland security and emergency management leadership? Have you heard their remarks and thought about how they apply to amateur radio? This month we'll take a look at a few of the puzzle pieces and see if we're getting the message.

## Preparation and Preparedness

For decades the Federal Emergency Management Agency has been responsible for preparing and responding to disasters. FEMA has now been integrated into the Department of Homeland Security as the department's Emergency Preparedness and Response Directorate, under the day-to-day direction of Chief Operating Officer Ron Castleman and Undersecretary Mike Brown, who often speaks on the topics of preparation and preparedness.

Over the summer, Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge spoke at a Public Preparedness Symposium. In his speech, he discussed a tabletop exercise in which he and 25 governors participated. According to Ridge, the exercise pointed out that in many cases you do not have all of the information that you would like to have, but "you have to do something. You can't wait until you have it all."

Ridge continued, "You can't secure the country from Washington, DC. You need partners all around the country in order to make it safer and more secure ... Homeland security must be a priority in every home, every city, every neighborhood across America."

"Our goal is to achieve seamless protection, a nation knit tightly together by shared vigilance, readiness, and communication," said Ridge. "Vigilance, readiness, and communication. And nowhere is this more important than in the area of emergency preparedness."

"No government entity, no organization, no information expert can replace individual responsibility. Citizens must choose to take actions," Ridge continued. "And our job is to make the choice an easy one. The success of our preparedness efforts and ultimately the entire homeland security mission depends on the involvement and work of individual citizens. Because if our communities are to rise to new levels of preparedness and security, each individual American must choose to make emergency planning a priority—a priority in our homes and our places of work and in our schools."

## Disasters Spawn Preparedness

According to Secretary Ridge, "If you ask people in south Florida or the Outer Banks of North Carolina about preparedness, they already know about buying supplies, keeping extra batteries handy, and even having a hurricane evacuation route planned. They get it. They hope they're not



*Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge: "We've laid out a public goal, and you've got to help me meet it!" (Department of Homeland Security photo)*

going to be hit by a hurricane. Chances are pretty good ... they may or may not, but they're not going to wait for chance. They get prepared."

"I'm just amazed," said Ridge, "that more people don't think of it in terms of providing some peace of mind to their own lives and to their own families." He wants to see people "respond when they have to without thinking about it," and says he feels that "there is a willingness on the part of Americans to take on this responsibility."

## Public Goal

Ridge continued, "We've laid out a public goal, and you've got to help me meet it, please....that by the end of this year, we want at least 50 percent of Americans to have accepted their responsibility to be ready. It's a communication plan; some form of training to assist at the time of a disaster, the kit set aside, the readiness kit. We need to get 50 percent by the end of the year, and I think we can get it done."

"The Department of Homeland Security will add strength to the existing Ready Campaign by launching two new endeavors, Ready for Business, Ready for Kids. It will continue to work with the Citizen Corps to encourage participation from families across America, whether by preparing family ready kits and emergency plans or volunteering to aid in disaster planning or engaging in CPR and training exercises to help people in a life threatening situation."

"I've been amazed at the number of people who have come forward to serve on Citizen Corps councils. All walks of life, all backgrounds, all communities. I think we're near 1000 communities that have a Citizen Corps. You meet some fascinating people. One fellow is in charge of the emergency radio network. You've got a bunch of ham radio operators in a tri-state area. He's got them networked together."

## Unification

Before September 11th every state, every city, and even individual response teams had their own pro-

\*c/o CQ magazine  
e-mail: <wa3pzo@cq-amateur-radio.com>



## Training and Response in India

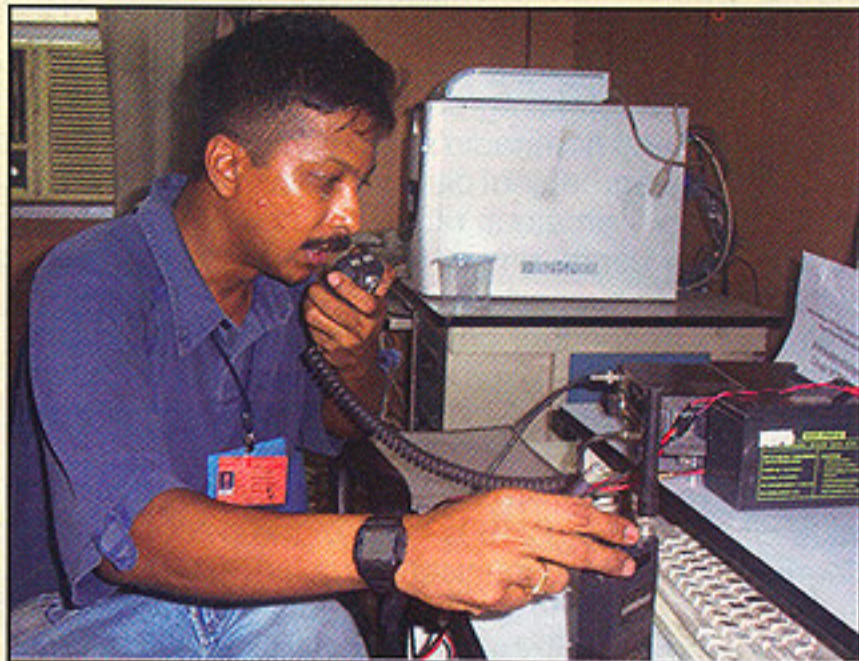
North America is not the only place amateur radio operators are active in emergency communications. Hams in India and other countries actively provide emergency communications support. This past summer, amateur radio operators participated in a simulated earthquake communications drill in the Northeast District of Delhi.

The Delhi Disaster Management Authority notified local hams about the "earthquake." Immediately, three teams of ham radio operators rushed to several critical locations to provide emergency communications. Stations were established at the Office of the Delhi Disaster Management Authority, Police Headquarters, Office of the Deputy Commissioner of Police, and the Divisional Commissioner's office.

According to Sandeep Barauh, VU2MUE, the communications teams brought mobile rigs, antennas, batteries, and solar-panel power backups. A digital communication setup was also established at the Divisional Commissioner's Office. Two-meter links were established on simplex when the local repeater "failed" because of the earthquake. HTs were also used for local communications. Messages were passed from the "disaster site" on behalf of the police and fire departments. Government officials visited the ham stations and felt that amateur radio can play a very important role in disaster communications. The hams were also able to demonstrate the use of Echolink in emergency communications and the potential for retrieving weather information.

In July, five members of the Mumbai Amateur Radio Society (MARS) sprang into action on behalf of the Ministry of Home Affairs and the United Nations Development Program. They were sent to the flood-ravaged areas of Bihar.

Nilesh Rathod, head of the local Amateur Radio Emergency Service, said, "There is a huge crisis in Bihar, but what is startling



Sandeep Barauh, VU2MUE, provides communications during a simulated earthquake exercise. (Photo courtesy of VU2MUE)

is that everyone seems used to the floods and the horrific living conditions."

He said that in the town of Sitamarhi the roads and rails were washed away. The local residents were building bamboo bridges to and charging people to cross them. That is how they recovered the cost of making the bridge and earned a living.

In order to get to his communication assignments, Nilesh would have to jump into a Jeep or risk wading through leech-infested waters.

cedures for emergency incidents. "For the first time," Ridge now says, "the National Response Plan provides a comprehensive roadmap for everyone to follow. As part of this plan, the National Incident Management System was introduced so that those involved in emergency response understand what their role is—and have the tools they need to be effective. It's the nation's first-ever standardized approach to incident management and response and it unifies federal, state, and local lines of government into one coordinated effort. This integrated system makes America safer by establishing a uniform set of processes, protocols, and procedures that all emergency responders—at every level of government—will use to conduct response actions."

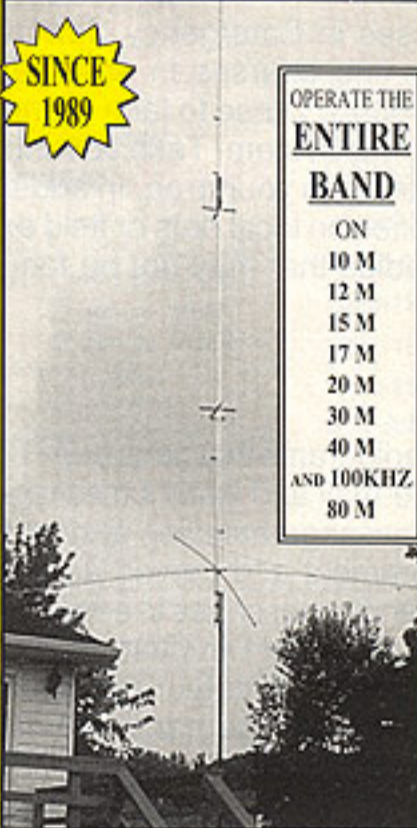
## All-Star Playbook

Ridge describes the system as "the playbook for the NFL Pro-Bowl Game." "When you bring together the best players from 26 different teams," he explains, "a plan of 'blue 42, slant right, release' might mean one thing to the quarterback, another thing to the wide receiver, and yet another to the linemen. At the call of 'hike,' chaos might break out on the field. At the very least, the play won't be successful. Now everyone shows up on game day with the same playbook. They will have the same preparation, the same goals and expectations, and—most important—they will be speaking the same language. When the quarterback calls a play, everyone will know what they are supposed to do. And in this battle, safety is far better than two points—in fact, it is the only result worth anything at all. Of course, a plan is nothing without the people to execute it, and many of you will play a vital role should we ever have to put our plan into action."

## Ham Radio is Ready

Now let's take a look at some of the ways amateur radio is

## TITAN DX MULTI BAND VERTICAL



THE ALL-PURPOSE ANTENNA

**GAP**  
ANTENNA PRODUCTS

Please Contact  
Us for a  
Free Catalog.

ANTENNA PRODUCTS, INC.  
99 NORTH WILLOW ST. • FELLSMERE, FL 32948

## #1 Selling Vertical Antenna

CHALLENGER

VOYAGER

TITAN

ACCESSORIES

EAGLE

NEW

Standard **GAP** Features

NO TRAPS • NO TUNING

\$339.00

Quick Assembly  
Elevated Feedpoint

### TITAN FEATURES

Height 25 ft. • Weight 21 lbs.  
MOUNTS ON A 1 1/4" OD PIPE  
NO RADIALS REQUIRED  
EXPAND YOUR MOUNTING OPTIONS!

(772) 571-9922

Visit Us At  
gapantenna.com



preparing to meet the challenges ahead and be a key player in the "Pro-Bowl."

A year and a half ago, the Department of Homeland Security signed a formal agreement with the ARRL to work on ways to expand ham radio's popularity as a public-safety resource. The agreement calls for collaboration on raising awareness about amateur radio, to provide training and accreditation for users, and to form local Citizen Corps volunteer councils to support rescue efforts.

"We're very dependent on ham radio folks," said DHS's Ron Castleman. "When something adverse does happen, they're the first to keep the information flowing, often without electricity."

According to ARRL President Jim Haynie, W5JBP, the ARRL's affiliation with DHS is "part of the bigger picture of getting emergency communications aligned with what our government needs." He continued "Amateur radio stands ready to serve the country as needed in times of emergency." Citizen Corps White House Liaison Liz DiGregorio urged amateur radio operators to explore ways to expand their role in the community beyond being a last resort when other communication systems fail.

"Amateur radio's been in the shadows for 75 years," Haynie added. "We always did our thing and then went home; we are our own worst publicists. But I've been spending a lot of time in Washington trying to get us recognition and legitimacy." His efforts have paid off, with the ARRL receiving a federal grant to expand emergency training for homeland security volunteers.

On another front, this columnist and others were interviewed for the July issue of *Homeland Protection Professional* magazine. One of the things I told the writer was that "being able to offer local government and emergency response agencies a trained voluntary communication resource will always make ham radio a desirable resource. The key is for the hams to be part of the training and planning in the community."

## Training

The ARRL offers several classes in Emergency Communications, and FEMA offers on-line courses in emergency management and response. A good course to take is one on the National Incident Management System. Take advantage of these courses and others offered in your area. In addition, participate in training opportunities on local nets or field exercises. Learn how to operate radios that may not be familiar to you.

## Message Handling

The days of the telegrams and radiograms that have been used for years are fading. Today it's e-mail and instant messaging. If ham radio is going to offer a message-handling system that is uniform at all levels of government and served agencies, then we'll have to learn how to handle messages in e-mail form.

This past summer, the ARRL Board of Directors approved the use of Winlink 2000, a worldwide amateur radio e-mail system, as a standard for digital message handling. ARRL Great Lakes Division Vice Director Dick Mondro, W8FQT, said situations arise when hams in the ARRL's Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES), must "pass message traffic across the nation quickly and accurately." The League committee that made the Winlink recommendation said the need for such a nationwide ARES capability is likely to increase in light of the ARRL's partnership with both the Citizen Corps and the Department of Homeland Security.

Winlink 2000 is already widely used by hams in the boating and recreational-vehicle communities. Training is needed to properly use the system. As with anything new, digital communications needs to be understood so that when the need to use it arises, you are not stopping to read the directions.

## One Set of Standards

Amateur radio emergency communicators are taking advantage of available training and are setting up local systems and plans to meet the national guidelines. These guidelines are here to stay. Even the 9/11 Commission report recommended that "Emergency response agencies nationwide should adopt the Incident Command System (ICS). When multiple agencies or multiple jurisdictions are involved, they should adopt a unified command. Both are proven frameworks for emergency response. We strongly support the decision that federal homeland security funding will be contingent, as of October 1, 2004, upon the adoption and regular use of ICS and unified command procedures. In the future, the Department of Homeland Security should consider making funding contingent on aggressive and realistic training in accordance with ICS and unified command procedures."

## Get Involved

If you're not already involved with local emergency communications, get involved now! Participating in Field Day is not enough to make you an experienced emergency communicator. We all need to be talking the same language, whether you're the Emergency Management Director or the ham radio operator.

## Being Prepared

This month we featured comments on emergency preparedness by Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge. We also highlighted a few of the ways amateur radio operators can respond to a national call for assistance. It's clear that we have had time to prepare and practice. To use Ridge's football analogy, hams have been providing emergency communications for years, but the rules have changed at the top and we have to be ready to play in the Pro Bowl in January. Is your group going to make the All Star Team?

On October 23 I'll be speaking at the ARRL Eastern Pennsylvania Emcomm Conference in Selingsgrove, PA. The conference is open to everyone. I'll be speaking on why "Field Day is Not Enough—The Importance of Establishing and Promoting an Effective EmComm Training Program." Other speakers will provide information on using Winlink 2000 and the National Incident Management System. For further information, go to <http://www.svemcomm.org>. I hope to see some of you there.

Do you have a story to tell? Drop me a note. We're always looking for stories of amateur radio operators serving in the public interest. Until next time . . .

73, Bob, WA3PZO

### Hams and Hurricane Charley

When Hurricane Charley hit Punta Gorda, Florida with its 145-mph winds in August, it left the town in "total communication failure," according to one ham who drove there to help with the emergency communications, adding that even a week later, "amateur radio was, and still is in many cases, the only means of communication." We will have complete coverage of the amateur radio response to Charley in next month's "Public Service" column.