

Government Communications Systems Division

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Harris/Intersil Amateur Radio Club (HIARC) Volunteers to Provide Emergency Communications during Hurricanes

The 2004 hurricane season will not soon be forgotten. When Charley struck Punta Gorda and passed across the middle of the state through Daytona Beach, the state of Florida thought it had seen the worst. Then came Frances, Ivan, and Jeanne. For every one of these unfortunate and devastating events, the Brevard County Office of Emergency Management called upon the Harris/Intersil Amateur Radio Club (HIARC) for assistance.

Amateur radio (slang = "ham radio") operators are typically among the first to respond during disasters or other incidents, volunteering their skills to assist public safety agencies. Hams fill the communications void left by downed telephone lines, broken cell phone towers, and power outages - quickly linking and coordinating relief efforts.

During this year's hurricane season HIARC operators were requested to assist with the following communications: The need to provide emergency electrical power to kidney dialysis centers; reporting when the roof failed at the Bayside Special Needs shelter; relaying medical messages, including a possible heart attack at Bayside Special Needs Shelter; relaying periodic shelter status messages to emergency management officials at the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) in Rockledge, including resident/guest census, food, water, sanitation, electrical, and communication status; communicating official word from the EOC to shelter managers regarding guest transfers, shelter closings, and transportation of guests requiring wheelchair and/or other special needs; welfare and status messages (e.g. "we're o.k. down here") were passed out of the area to anxious relatives; and summoning emergency assistance as needed.

What prepares an amateur radio operator to handle emergency communications during a hurricane? Yearly contests train hams in efficient operating and message passing protocols. Day to day operating for pleasure keeps skills fresh and equipment in a ready-to-

go state. Many hams have completed a training course offered by the National Weather Service so they may accurately access and report unusual or hazardous weather conditions. Additionally, one HIARC member attends a monthly emergency communications preparedness meeting at the Brevard Emergency Operations Center (EOC) in Rockledge. This keeps club members and EOC personnel mutually informed as to status, training, and exercises.

“One thing is for sure, shelter managers were very grateful for their ham radio volunteers,” said **Francis “Butch” Parsche**, Harris employee and president of the HIARC. “One shelter manager called the hams ‘their buffer,’ as the ham volunteer was able to brief shelter management and coordinate outside help. It freed them up to manage the busy situation they were in.”

Harris employee **Jim Tonti** (KC7SSW) volunteered during Hurricane Charley at Central Middle school, after Hurricane Francis at Westside Elementary, and again after Hurricane Jeanne at Central Middle School. Jim spent about 24 hours at each school for each hurricane assisting the Red Cross and school personnel with communications to and from the EOC and other officials.

Harris security guard, **Robert Rogers** (WA1TJS) volunteered along with retired Harris employees **Al Moore** (W3QO) and **Jan Heise** (K4QD). After Hurricane Frances, **Steve Minner** (W4SWM), setup communications at the amateur radio station (K4HRS) located in building 15 at Harris GCSD to provide backup communications to police, fire and for the GCSD Damage Assessment Team.

Many of the HIARC operators received letters or certificates of appreciation from the organizations they assisted: **Bob Harvey** (W4BQD), from the Palm Bay Community Hospital for his service during Hurricane Frances and **Cliff Wagner** (WB6TCY), from the City of Palm Bay Disaster Communications Services. Cliff even received a police escort through several cities to assure his safe arrival at Melbourne High School where he established communications.

GCSD employees **Greg Turnquist** (KC0ISU) and **Don Winn** (AF4Z) traveled to Punta Gorda to provide amateur radio emergency communications after Hurricane Charley. Additionally, Don volunteered at the Melbourne National Weather Service office during Hurricane Frances.

Harris employee **Ken Hendrickson** (N8KH) maintained portable generator power at the Harris Turkey Creek 400' tower to keep the amateur radio repeater (radio relay) system operating. He went to the facility several times a day to refuel and maintain the tower. **Scott Swartley**, **Earl King**, **Phil Waddell**, and **Ryan McGuire** all helped as well by climbing the Harris towers to install needed antennas.

Special recognition should be given to all of the amateur radio operators for their ongoing commitment to volunteerism and heroic efforts during these emergency situations.

Harris has had an amateur radio club for over three decades. Currently, there are 40 active members in the club, which meets monthly. Membership is open to all past and present Harris employees with an interest in amateur radio. For additional details, visit the [HIARC's website](#).



**Greg Turnquist, Harris Employee at a staging area
in Punta Gorda (Charlotte County)**



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