



New Mexico Amateur Radio Press Release



Contact: Charlie Christmann, K5CEC
Phone: (505) 771-0097 / 505-238-0644
k5cec@arrl.net

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
12:00 a.m., March 16, 2006

NEW MEXICO FUNDS EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK

When New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson signed the 2006 Budget Bill into law, it contained a \$500,000 allocation to design, construct, and install a state-wide emergency communication network. Though the money will be allocated to the New Mexico Department of Public Safety, the purpose is to purchase Amateur Radio equipment for Amateur Radio Operators (Hams) to use in a disaster. All of the equipment will be State owned.



Representative Tom
Anderson, R-Bernalillo

Preliminary plans for the State purchased equipment call for the installation of strategically located, interlinked VHF and UHF repeaters. Both voice and digital packet data will flow across this network from one side of the state to the other.

Representative Tom Anderson, R - Bernalillo, who is a licensed Amateur Radio Operator, KB5YSG, sponsored the bill in the 2006 New Mexico Legislative session. "After hurricane Katrina, we've seen first-hand just how valuable Amateur Radio can be in a disaster,"

Anderson said. "The Gulf Coast hurricanes destroyed communications infrastructure and overwhelmed Government resources. It was Amateur Radio Operators that helped to save the day by providing vital

communications. This money is an investment by New Mexico for the protection of lives, property, and public lands in the event of a catastrophe here.”

The New Mexico Emergency Management Association, the State Department of Homeland Security Director Tim Manning, and many of the Amateur Radio associations around the State worked very hard to make sure that the emergency network funding made it past the Governor’s desk.

New Mexico is lucky in that hurricanes and tsunamis are not a threat to the State. But the potential for disastrous wildfires, tornadoes, and flooding is ever present. Because of the lack of moisture this winter, the forests and grasslands are extremely dry; hence, the 2006 fire season is predicted to be the worst in many years. Through the middle of March 2006, more 100,000 acres have already been burned in a very early start to the fire season.

When major fires strike the State, Hams have been there alongside the emergency responders. This year, when range fires broke out near Hobbs and communications were needed, it was Hams that provided that service. During the Cerro Grande Fire in 2000, more than 130 Ham Radio operators volunteered their time and personal equipment. Over the fourteen day period, they logged 2500 hours at fifteen different locations, including Red Cross shelters and Emergency Operations Centers.

After multiple hurricanes slammed into the U.S. Gulf Coast, Government officials from the local level to the federal level have rediscovered the value of amateur communications. Amateur Radio Operators again, at their own expense, traveled to the Gulf Coast to volunteer their time and equipment after Katrina decimated communications systems in Georgia, Mississippi and Louisiana.

In their report, “*A Failure of Initiative*”, the Select Bipartisan Committee to investigate the preparation for and response to Hurricane Katrina praised Ham radio operators for their efforts. “Like all



Two Sandoval County ARES members install a repeater on Pajarito Peak to provide communications in the Jemez Mountains. - SCARES photo

levels of government, National Communication System was not able to address all aspects of the damage to the communications infrastructure of the Gulf States. NCS coordinated the frequencies used by the nearly 1000 Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES) volunteers across the nation who served in the Katrina stricken area providing communications for government agencies, the Red Cross and The Salvation Army.” The report continued, “Emergency communications were conducted not only by voice, but also by high-speed data transmissions using state-of-the art digital communications software known as *Winlink*.”

U. S. Representative Mike Ross of Arkansas praised Amateur Radio before the U. S. House of Representatives. “I rise today to recognize the contributions of American citizens who are members of the



Outside the American Red Cross marshaling center in Montgomery, Alabama, Section Manager Greg Sarratt, W4OZK (center), assists two Amateur Radio volunteers headed into the hurricane-stricken zone. - ARRL photo

American Radio Relay League, known as HAM radio operators. Citizens throughout America dedicated to this hobby--a hobby that some people consider old fashioned or obsolete--were true heroes in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina as they were often the only line of communication available into the storm ravaged areas.” Ross continued,” Just as after major earthquakes, tornadoes, and the terrorist attacks of 9/11, HAM operators around the country received an alert to stand by their radios to listen for calls for assistance. Following Hurricane

Katrina, when cell phones and e-mail were useless, a HAM operator located in Connecticut alerted authorities about a woman trapped for 4 days without food or water and a Coast Guard Auxiliary in Cleveland arranged for a medevac for a woman in labor in New Orleans. These are just a few examples of the many lives that were saved with the critical intervention of HAM operators throughout the country.”

In an emergency, the public does not immediately think of Amateur Radio, but Emergency Managers do. The City of Lufkin, Texas, in reviewing its hurricane Rita response, cited the need to “Identify more ham radio operators and make better utilization of them as not to run out of operators.”

Emergency Managers, many of them have earned their Amateur Radio License, recognize that Amateur operators prepare for service just like any professional first responder. Several times each year, Hams participate with local, state, and federal officials in Simulated Emergency Tests so that everyone knows what the other’s capabilities and responsibilities will be. Federal Emergency Management Administration training courses are required for all Hams in New Mexico who participate in any type of emergency response. Many Hams have also completed one or more Emergency Communications courses provided by the American Radio Relay League (ARRL). This training, and the professionalism displayed by “amateurs”, is why Ham radio gets high marks for its service during real emergencies.

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In the past few years, New Mexico Hams have been called upon several times for duty:

- Cerro Grande fires in Los Alamos – May 2000
- La Cueva Fire – March 2003
- Virgin Fire – June 2003
- Sandoval and Lincoln Counties forest fires – 2003 and 2004
- Northern New Mexico river flood watch – Spring 2005
- Albuquerque, Katrina Refugees – September 2005
- Eastern New Mexico Range Fires – January 2006
- Eastern New Mexico SkyWarn weather spotting – Every Summer

Private event organizers recognize the need for communications and local Hams are happy to help with safety and coordination:

- Duke City Marathon
- Run for the Zoo
- Bicycle Rally
- Santa Fe Century Bike Tour
- La Luz Run
- American Diabetes Association
- Tour de Cure
- “Oh My God” Motocross Race
- Special Olympics Torch Run
- Race to Sandia Crest

- MS 150 Atomic Tour
- Crop Walk

The American Radio Relay League has formal agreements with several national organizations that provide for emergency services. New Mexico Hams provide services for their local affiliates:

- Department of Homeland Security
- Federal Emergency Management Agency
- National Communications System
- American Red Cross
- Salvation Army
- National Weather Service
- Civil Air Patrol
- Association of Public Safety Communications Officials

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Background

Representative Tom Anderson, who has had an interest in Amateur radio since age 9, holds a General Class Amateur Radio License. He retired to New Mexico from the U. S. Navy in 1977 after 20 years of service. Tom is a graduate of the USN Communications Officer's School and the Navy also certified him as a "Navel Ordnance Engineer," (Nuclear). While in the Navy, Tom served a tour of duty as the Communications Officer of the USS Bexar (APA-237). He has been involved with the Sandoval County Amateur Radio Emergency Service for more than five years. Currently, Tom represents Bernalillo County's District 29 in the State House of Representative.

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Additional Information

New Mexico Office of Emergency Management: www.dps.nm.org/emergency

Cerro Grande Fire: www.laarc.org/CerroGrandeFire-K5QIN.html

ARES Affiliated Groups

Bernalillo County ARES: www.bc-ares.org

Estancia Valley ARA: www.evara.org

Lincoln County ARES www.qsl.net/k5ric

Los Alamos ARC: www.laarc.org

Pecos Valley ARC: www.dfn.com/PVARC

Sandoval County ARES: www.nmscares.org

Valencia County ARA: www.qsl.net/kc5our

General Amateur Radio Information

Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES): www.arrl.org/ares

American Radio Relay League (ARRL): www.arrl.org

New Mexico Section of the ARRL: www.arrl.org/sections/?sect=NM

Packet Radio Tutorial: www.arrl.org/tis/info/pdf/49244.pdf

Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES): See 47 CFR 97.407 and
www.fema.gov/library/civilpg.shtm

Repeater Tutorial: www.arrl.org/FandES/ead/materials/Repeater.ppt

Note:

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Interested in becoming a Ham? www.hello-radio.org

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