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The ARRL Emergency Coordinator's Manual



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Dateline Michigan— Interacting with Public Officials

12.1 Introduction

Joe Turner, K8CQF, and former Michigan SM George Race, WB8BGY, filed the following reports (edited for manual) concerning their organizational efforts within the Michigan Section. Their successful experiences should have broad-based applicability to ARES groups throughout the nation.

12.2 How Public Officials View Amateur Radio

During the week of September 26, 1988, public officials from cities and villages throughout the State of Michigan gathered in the city of Saginaw for their annual Municipal League Convention. Saginaw, which lies slightly below and to the west of Michigan's thumb, sits smack dab in the middle of the state's very active ARES/RACES District 3.

This convention of mayors, city managers, and other government officials was of special significance to Michigan's ham radio leaders because they had just finished an effort to revitalize Michigan's Amateur Radio emergency communication structure and were now ready to find out what the state's public officials knew about emergency communications.

Preliminary work on revitalization was completed in 1987. It had begun with an examination of ARES and RACES functions, and was followed with a complete change in ARES district lines to correspond exactly with Michigan State Police emergency management Districts (which are used for the State's RACES program). Concurrent with the district realignment was a vigorous effort by ARRL and RACES officials to encourage enrollment in both ARES and RACES by each ham interested in public service. As soon as the "union" of the two groups was accomplished on paper, one person in each of the joint districts was appointed as the DEC/RACES Manager. Then a series of informational meetings was held across the state. They were put together by officials of RACES, State Police and FEMA. Their purpose was to provide a forum for

government officials to demonstrate their support of Amateur Radio public service, to reinforce the concept of dual enrollment and to explain how the two groups could function jointly.

Those meetings were followed with comprehensive training sessions produced by the ARRL Section leadership. Their sessions focused upon what the annual SET is, basic traffic handling techniques, traffic handling tips for specific modes of operation, utilization of Michigan's new Emergency Packet Network (MEPN), and tips on working with your local unit of government and relief agencies.

This hard work by ARRL, FEMA, and State Police officials had an immediate impact. Overall participation in Michigan's ARES/RACES functions, including SET, skyrocketed, and performance levels of individual hams became outstanding.

On to the Convention

It was against this background that Michigan Section District 3 ARES/RACES Officers decided to poll public officials attending the annual conference in our district. We knew Michigan hams were receiving proper training and support from the ARES/RACES structure; now we wanted to assess knowledge of "Amateur Radio public service" by those community leaders who might call upon us in times of emergency. So, we attended the 1988 Michigan Municipal League Convention with the ARRL flag a-flyin', stacks of brochures, a portable packet station, and our survey to check attitudes.

Approximately 600 mayors, city managers, council members, and other elected and appointed municipal officials attended the convention. We were able to interview 129 of them.

The Survey

Q. Have you ever had contact with your local ham radio group?

A. Yes — 20% No — 80%

Q. Is your overall impression of Amateur Radio that they are primarily...

- A. an educational group — (0.8%)
- B. an emergency group — (11.6%)
- C. a hobby group — 17.8%
- A. a combination — 69.8%

Q. Do you know the difference between ARES and RACES?

- A. Yes — 1.6% No — 98.4%

Q. Have you worked with ham radio operators directly?

- A. Yes — 25.6% No — 74.4%

Q. Is your overall impression of Amateur Radio...

- A. Favorable — 89.5%
- B. Unfavorable — 0%
- C. No opinion — 10.5%

Note! The last question was devised after the survey had begun.

Miscellaneous Comments from Respondents

"We contacted local hams for help and attended a ham meeting. The meeting was poorly run and the hams were not responsive to our request for help."

"Hams in our community were more trouble than they were worth. We tried them for cross-country skiing and a triathlon type activity."

"If you have a couple of active leaders, the group functions well. Otherwise, the hams are lost in the background. You need a sparkplug."

"When I was involved in emergency management at the county level, hams were reporting tornadoes that weren't there."

"We love our ham radio operators. They donate their time to us and they're not selfish. Each year they help us pack toys for children."

What We Found

It appears that the professionals who run Michigan's cities and villages are able to see the overall picture pretty clearly. In spite of some very direct criticisms of certain amateur groups, not one public official rated the Amateur Radio Service unfavorably overall. In fact, it looks as though they are heavily biased in favor of ham radio. They seem to be willing to recognize that we are hobbyists with a very special talent, and they are able to forgive a certain amount of inappropriate behavior.

It should also be noted that the criticisms which we've printed each represent a single person's point of view. They are not indicative of the viewpoint which may have been espoused had we interviewed the entire

leadership of a given community. Furthermore, circumstances might quickly alter those opinions. For example, an elderly woman happened to get lost in the forests surrounding the remote community where the one fellow said "hams were more trouble than they were worth." It turns out that the local hams were very involved in search and rescue operations. From reports that I received while preparing this article, it appears that not everyone in that community regards the operators as more trouble than they were worth. Nevertheless, critical comments such as that fellow's are very useful as a means for us to discover things which we do that are irritating to others or specifically harmful to a cause.

You may have a wonderful opportunity to make a friend in high places according to this survey. Personal knowledge of ham radio by community leaders was limited to no more than approximately one quarter of the respondents. This suggests that information regarding the Amateur Radio Service is conveyed to community leaders via the media, subordinates or others with whom they have contact. Clearly, it would be wise to obtain as much media coverage of your annual operating activities as possible and, perhaps you might want to introduce yourself to a local leader or two.

A word of caution, however; my experience over the last 17 years as a government employee convinces me that most of these individuals have many demands upon their time. Also, I believe that first impressions can be lasting ones. Consequently, I'd like to suggest that when you meet with them, be concise, provide information about yourself and your emergency communications capability, and then let them move on to other things. If they have questions, they'll ask them, and they'll certainly remember your professionalism—and you.

Unfortunately, some individual hams (and in some cases, entire groups) waste a tremendous amount of time and energy bickering over distinctions between ARES and RACES. This survey's results don't support that action; only two persons of the 129 interviewed had any idea that there might be such a distinction between groups performing emergency communications. All they really knew was that hams can provide a good means of communication when times get tough.

As a communications coordinator in a city EOC, I had the opportunity to listen as public officials made decisions during practice sessions and during real emergencies. Arguments between hams over ARES and RACES functions are really "Mickey Mouse" stuff to an official who is attempting to make decisions affecting thousands of people and millions of dollars. For heaven's sake, if you intend to become a force for

good in your community, organize yourselves so that you're informed, be enthusiastic and open minded, work together, and do what you say you can do. Finally, find that "sparkplug" to be your leader.

I would also like to refer you to WA6AOD's article on page 54 of October 1988 *QST*. It does a good job of clarifying points of contention that may arise during service in emergency communication networks. I am particularly concerned with the willingness of hams to become more than communicators, to assume roles of medical advisors or law enforcement officers. While reading the referenced article, entitled "Emergency Communication: is it Legal?", try to imagine how you would defend your behavior if you were sued as someone responsible for the exacerbation of an injury, or worse, through your own negligence, lack of knowledge, or exaggeration of your own self-importance. [Note: Certain aspects of that article may no longer be current in view of the revised Part 97 which became effective September 1, 1989, as well as the likely changes to 97.113 which may be in place by the time this manual is released.]

Also, there is sometimes a lack of definition of responsibility between hams and public officials, which can lead to misunderstandings and sometimes downright dangerous situations. For example, I have seen hams working a sporting event placed in a situation where a group of first-aid workers demanded that an ambulance be called for an athlete they believed was having heart problems. Others at the scene told the hams not to call an ambulance because they didn't feel the problem was related to cardiac complications. The hams on site refused to make the call. The first-aid workers overrode that decision by finding a different ham radio operator who would make the call. The merits of the decision were discussed on the air and essentially broadcast all over the city to anyone monitoring. Part of the decision not to call an ambulance was based upon the cost of transportation and the competency of the medical people on site. It was one of those cases where hams could have been labeled "more trouble than they were worth," and it led to a good deal of friction between hams, the sponsoring organization, and two health-care providers on the scene.

The whole thing could have been avoided had community officials indicated from the beginning (or if ham radio operators had asked) who had final authority in making medical decisions from the field.

There are related issues dealing with law enforcement. Some agencies are more than willing to deputize hams involved in emergency communications. Well, there are about a half million of us out there, and with numbers that large, there are bound to be a few bad

apples.

I once had a new ham in the area volunteer to be part of the local public service group. He seemed nice enough, but as it turned out, he had recently been released from prison after serving time for a violent felony. Now the issues surrounding his participation in ARES or RACES activities are not absolute. They involve his right to privacy, his guarantees under the law since he had met his obligation to society, the risks he may have posed to a community, his sincere effort to begin a new life, and a lot of other things. However, this individual certainly had shown a lack of integrity in the past, and there is a question as to whether or not he represented a threat to innocent people.

What would have been the results of his being appointed to a position of authority by a government unit, or being deputized by a law enforcement agency? Convicted felons may not be willing to divulge their pasts, nor are you always able to uncover details.

Summary

This survey has led to the discussion of many issues by our local amateur community and by public officials. We closed out our final day with some nice things happening. First, one city council member, in responding to the survey, said, "we love our hams." Then we were fortunate enough to receive a number of compliments about our booth being an asset to the convention. Finally, hams were invited to set up a display next year in the 1989 "Pride of Michigan" display at the Municipal League Convention!

We were glad we were there too. We learned a lot and hope that we are better able to serve in our state because we better understand our community leaders—and they us. It was wonderful to shake hands and share ideas. We also hope that our experiences will be of some use to you. See you in next year's SET! (from Joe Turner, K8CQF)

12.3 The Michigan Section Structure—Concepts and Organization

As well defined and organized as a Section structure may appear, there is still a major missing link that is sometimes difficult to overcome, that is, the link between state and local government officials and the League's volunteers. In some areas, these volunteers have worked closely with government agencies, have earned their respect and confidence, and are utilized to the fullest extent. In other areas, ARES volunteers find it difficult to become associated with government agencies to any extent. What makes the difference?

In every emergency, there is a government agency directly charged with the first response. Any volunteer