

GAREC-07 Global Amateur Radio Emergency Communications Conference, Huntsville, Alabama, USA 16-17 August 2007

Report by Chairman, IARU Region 3 Disaster Communications Committee

This report looks at the progress made to date by member Societies in accordance with IARU Region 3 policy which encourages them to take action to ensure that the Amateur Service is better prepared for its role of providing communications in times of an emergency or natural disaster.

The 13th IARU Region 3 Conference held August 7 - 11, 2006 in Bangalore resolved to encourage radio societies to have their administrations fully implement the changes to Article 25 of the ITU Radio Regulations in respect of third party traffic and preparation for emergency communications.

It also decided that there should be a regional Simulated Emergency Test (SET), and that monitoring occur on the progress or otherwise of member Societies in their efforts to have national administrations implement relevant changes from WRC-03.

The SET is a tool to help develop existing recognition that more needs to be done in terms of emergency communications. The 13th Conference revealed that most member Societies fully supported the concept.

Its aims include:

- Testing equipment and training personnel under message handling conditions
- Foster greater cooperation within the region
- Help increase awareness of the Amateur Service and its role

In recognition of the difficulty, at least in the early introduction of SET, to achieve it on a regional basis it is suggested that in the short-term, member Societies can conduct one within their own country or perhaps involve neighboring countries if that is possible.

The CRSA advised that it holds an annual simulated emergency test that includes field-day type operation and message handling, however it has not been able to provide information on whether its administration has adopted the Article 25 changes post-WRC-03. HARTS has also advised it conducts SET-type activity and its administration had previously made changes to its regulations in support of emergency communications and these are being reviewed to ensure they cover all of the Article 25 changes.

Nothing has yet been heard from other IARU Region 3 member Societies as to whether they already have a SET-type activity, if one is proposed or whether there are still domestic regulations that impede such an activity.

The ultimate objective is to have a coordinated annual SET for the whole region, or at least on a sub-regional basis. The SET may also help member Societies focus on the possibility of setting up an Amateur Radio Emergency Corp (AREC), where appropriate.

The WIA is setting up a new national network of emergency communications known as WIANNEC to cover the wider Australasian Region and be in addition to, and complement the existing state and territory based WICEN (Wireless Institute Civil Emergency Network) capability.

The WIA is compiling a database of radio amateurs who are prepared and resourced to

provide disaster communications; this includes their deployment and sustainment limitations. In time WIANNEC will want to liaise with similar organisations in neighbouring countries, and improve relationships with other agencies that have roles in disaster recovery.

SEANET (South East Asia Net) is well established and consideration could be given to enlist its support for SET, or at least some of its members, particularly those in areas with a very low number of radio amateurs, to be involved.

SET Timing

The month of October for SET activity seems acceptable in terms of propagation. A date has not been proposed, however the CQ WW and Oceania DX Contest weekends, and cultural events in that month would need to be taken into account.

It is proposed that publicity of the SET should occur in the lead up to it and a report on the actual activity needs to be prepared. The target audiences of this promotion include the general amateur radio community, other agencies involved in emergency recovery, radio administrations, government and relevant government ministers. Some member Societies may find it appropriate to involve disaster relief agencies in their SET.

The ability to deploy radio amateurs and equipment from outside a disaster affected nation needs to be facilitated where possible. While this may not be achievable or even acceptable in the short-term in some countries, it is a goal that can be achieved in others.

There is also an indication that organised communications volunteers are beginning to make their presence known, sometimes in support of NGOs and other disaster recovery stakeholders. These activities may or may not adversely impact on the role of the Amateur Service.

Check-list for IARU Region 3 member Societies

The IARU Region 3 policy is that monitoring occur of the progress of adoption into national regulations, of the changes to Article 25 adopted at World Radiocommunication Conference 2003.

These changes are:

- **25.3** – International communications on behalf of third parties
- **25.9A** - Administrations encouraged to take the necessary steps to allow amateur stations to prepare for and meet communication needs in support of disaster relief.

Another important element of the role of the Amateur Service is the Tampere Convention on the Provision of Telecommunications Resources for Disaster Mitigation and Relief operations, adopted in 1998 by the Intergovernmental Conference on Emergency Telecommunications in Tampere, Finland.

It established a framework for the reduction and/or removal of barriers to radio amateurs gaining permission to operate and move equipment into a disaster zone, from outside an affected country.

Each member Society, if they have not already done so, are encouraged to examine their national regulations to identify any barriers to the Amateur Services adequately preparing for and providing emergency communications.

Conclusion

While acknowledging the slow progress being made by IARU Region 3, I welcome the initiative of the IARU AC at its meeting in Boston this year and look forward to the results and assistance from Hans Zimmermann, F5VKP / HB9AQS IARU International Coordinator for Emergency Communications.

I look forward to the outcomes of GAREC-07 and extend my best wishes for its success.

Regards,

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