

An Up-date from the IARU International Emergency Communications Coordinator

Dear fellow hams,

A lot is happening in the field of Emergency Communications and has been reflected in reports addressed to the Amateur Radio community and often also in the general media. Rather than adding to such information, I would like to present some thoughts about issues of a more internal nature which come to my attention more and more frequently :

Emergency communications are one small sector within the multitude of activities that make amateur radio such a fascinating activity. Hams are usually introduced to this subject in one of two ways: The hard way, by being confronted with an acute emergency situation, or the far more desirable way, by recognizing the value of our skills for providing a public service well before they are urgently needed. Most successful is, of course, the second way: Preparedness and training, based on lessons learned from past events.

A lack of interest in emergency communications is, unfortunately, very common. This shortcoming is not limited to the amateur service - I have been confronted with it throughout my professional work with the United Nations system. In short: Nothing happens before something has happened. At such a moment everybody knows what went wrong and supports all efforts to improve things through preparedness, training and resources. But all too fast such lessons are forgotten, and all the other day-to-day challenges take priority.

The way forward needs endurance, and continuity. Fortunately, there are people, who either do not forget so fast, or who keep in mind why the amateur radio community deserves the privileges we enjoy. The value of these privileges has never been higher than in this time of dramatic increase of commercial spectrum demands.

This also refers to the role of the IARU: Those involved in negotiations with the ITU are very well aware of the importance of emergency communications as a key argument when it comes to the defence of our bands and to new topics such as the 5 MHz allocation presently on the agenda of the next World Radio Conference (WRC). Of course I often wish that the work on emergency communications would find more interest and support than it got over the past few years. But, once more, our dedication to public service is only just one of the many fascinating aspects of our hobby.

We also need to keep these facts in mind when it comes to the role of the national IARU Member Societies in respect to Emergency Communications: In some countries, independent specialized groups have been established. Depending on the specific situation this might appear as the only way for those who realize the importance of public service in amateur radio, because preparedness requires a minimum of organizational structures. There are examples, where a cooperation between such specialized groups and the national IARU Member Society works very successfully, and cases where such groups are actually parts of the organizational structure of the respective Member Society. Unfortunately, there are also cases where misunderstandings still have to overcome, often because the national society sees a specialized group as a "competition". The only solution for all sides is the old rule "do what you can do best" – and stay within this particular activity, avoiding potential conflicts.

A national society is by its very nature the partner of the national telecommunications authority, which is the government entity implementing the international regulations the

IARU negotiates with the ITU. Specialized groups need to carefully avoid any misunderstandings in this regard – it is the national society alone, which represents all operators of the Amateur Service in the respective country. At the same time, an emergency communications group needs to work with the partners in emergency response - both institutional partners like fire-fighters or Samaritans and volunteer groups like those of the Red Cross or Red Crescent or the Boy Scouts on the appropriate local, regional or national levels: It is only through cooperation with these partners, that we can apply our skills for the benefit of those affected by disasters.

To find ways which satisfy the needs of those representing the Amateur Service as such and those working on Emergency Telecommunications is not always easy, but it is absolutely indispensable. This applies for all levels, from local collaboration like joint exercises between a local emergency communications group with local rescue teams all the way to representation of our interests on national and ultimately on international level. We are communicators, so we should be able to solve problems in appropriate ways ! Let's talk !

All this being said, let me emphasize that while our strength is the readiness of the individual ham to put his skills to best use when it comes to public service, communication is not a solitary activity. We need to work together, if we want to achieve our goal of preventing and, where this is not possible, alleviating the suffering of those affected by disasters. Experiences during many of the unfortunately numerous major disasters have shown what our Amateur Service can contribute as a voluntary public service - so let's go ahead !

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