

## The Role of the Amateur Radio Service in Response to Emergencies and Disasters

### When communication is needed most...

The Amateur Radio Service is one of the radio services internationally recognized by the ITU. It benefits from a share of the precious spectrum, and from specific privileges, which make it the most flexible and versatile of all telecommunication services. It has earned its status due to its roles of in education, development, and research, but most of all due to its role as a public service:

- In emergency situations, its global network and as its numerous national and local networks and Amateur Radio Organizations support those affected by a disaster as well as those providing assistance. Flexible, independent of vulnerable infrastructure, and immune against overload, these networks often provide the only life line between those affected and their families and friends, and the vital link between the affected location and those who need information to ensure the appropriate help from outside.
- In emergency situations, the public and private communication systems we all take for granted may no longer be available. At that time, the role of the Amateur Radio Service extends far beyond the provision of own networks. Its operators are people with a passion for radio communications and for achieving results with minimal resources under even the most adverse conditions. Radio Amateurs make their skills available by assisting the emergency responders in the operation of their own telecommunication networks.

The skills of the operators are ensured not only by the knowledge they need to acquire for passing the license exam, but by their continuous use of a wide variety of communication modes and in many cases by special training in emergency communications. Amateur Radio includes a wide variety of activities, ranging from technical aspects to participation in operational events with sometimes even a sports character, and from experiments with new technologies to the restoration and use of classical equipment.

The availability of such invaluable manpower in an emergency situation depends on the existence of Radio Amateur stations and operators. Worldwide there are more than 2 Million Amateurs or “hams”, as they call themselves, but they are not evenly distributed among the 191 ITU Member States. The Amateur Radio Service is internationally regulated by the ITU, but it is up to each national authority to apply these regulations and to ensure favourable conditions for the application of this important resource for development, education and emergency response. By facilitating the work of the national amateur radio society, an administration renders an important service to its citizens.

The International Amateur Radio Union (IARU), in close cooperation with the ITU, supports the efforts of national telecommunication authorities and the national IARU member societies. IARU offers training courses on the administration of the Amateur Radio Service, and help for the development of country-specific training material for Amateur Radio societies is available as well.

The role of the volunteers of the Amateur Radio Service in many of the dramatic events of the recent past has been noticed, and it is now the time to prepare for a best possible use of this resource.

*For more information, please contact the IARU International Secretariat, POB 310905, Newington, CT, 06131-0905, USA, <[www.iaru.org](http://www.iaru.org)>, or the IARU International Emergency Communications Coordinator, Hans Zimmermann, [hb9aqs@arrl.net](mailto:hb9aqs@arrl.net).*



**The International Amateur Radio Union**

Since 1925, the Federation of National Amateur Radio Societies  
Representing the Interests of Two-Way Amateur Radio Communication