

Amateur Radio Operators as Professionals

What has Attitude got to do with it?

- a) Everything – attitude is more important than radio skills
- b) The attitude of some ham volunteers has been our weakest point
- c) One emergency manager stated “working with hams is like herding cats - get them out of here”
- d) “Professionalism” means getting the job done with minimum fuss
- e) No matter what agency we serve, an emcomm volunteer is like an unpaid employee

How Professional Emergency Responders Often View Volunteers

- a) Professionals in any field often expend much time and great effort into developing skills and training
- b) Volunteers are often part-timers whose skills and dedication may vary widely
- c) Unless a positive and long established relationship exists, professionals are likely to consider volunteers as “less than useful”
- d) Police agencies are often distrustful of outsiders – often for legitimate security reasons
- e) It takes time to prove our skills and resources, and to develop a positive working relationship
- f) If an offer of assistance is refused, do not press the issue – the served agency’s authority should never be challenged. They are in charge, not you.

Who Works for Whom?

- a) It does not matter if you are a part of a group like the Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES) or Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES)
- b) You’re working for your community and the served agency - you work for *them*
- c) You are there to provide communications - communications is job #1
- d) If you do not feel comfortable doing this, do not volunteer

Performing Non-Communications Roles

- a) The old model of the emergency communicator was to format and transmit a message passed to them from the served agency. Those days are gone forever.
- b) The new job description will likely be “any function that includes communication” as defined by the served agency
- c) Emcomm groups should be prepared to perform many tasks, such as:
 - i) radio operator - using amateur radio or agency equipment
 - ii) dispatcher - organizing the flow of personnel, vehicles or supplies
 - iii) resource coordinator - organizing the assignments of volunteers
 - iv) field observer – watching and reporting weather or other conditions
 - v) damage assessor – evaluating and reporting damage conditions
 - vi) van driver – moving people or supplies
 - vii) searcher – providing communications for search and rescue

- d) You may need to complete task-specific training, and participate in exercises and drills

Specific Agency Relationships

- a) Relationships between volunteers and served agencies can be quite different from agency to agency
- b) “Memorandums of Understanding” (MOUs), “Statements of Understanding” (SOUs), or “Statements of Affiliation” (SOAs) define general relationships
- c) Emcomm groups often have written agreements with local agency officials
- d) Some examples of MOUs can be found with:
 - i) Department of Homeland Security
 - ii) Federal Emergency Management Agency
 - iii) American Red Cross
 - iv) The Salvation Army
 - v) State or Local Emergency Management
 - vi) SKYWARN

Talking to the Press

- a) In an emergency situation, the press will be hunting for tidbits
- b) NEVER give out personal information
- c) NEVER give out information about a served agency
- d) Some emcomm organizations have their own spokes person
- e) Emcomm spokes persons provide information about the ham radio group’s efforts – NOT about the served agency
- f) If a reporter will not leave you alone, only discuss your part of the emergency communications effort, but only if permitted

Volunteering Where You Are Not Known

- a) Many emergencies will occur in neighboring or distant areas
- b) It is best to contact emergency communications or management teams in that area before making significant preparations
- c) It’s possible your offer will be welcome, but it’s equally possible you may be refused
- d) If the effort is not well organized, little information or support may be provided - you may have to improvise or fend for yourself
- e) The best time to offer your services is well before an emergency occurs – when the time comes to serve, you will be ready for the job, and the job will be ready for you.

Worker’s Compensation Coverage and Legal Protections

- a) In some states Worker’s Compensation extends to volunteers working on behalf of a government or non-profit agency
- b) Worker’s Compensation law is complex and regulated by individual states’ laws
- c) Emcomm managers should investigate the applicable Worker’s Compensation state law

- d) Volunteers providing service to government agencies or tax-exempt organizations are provided immunity from liability by the Volunteer Protection Act of 1997, 42 U.S.C. Section 14501.
- e) However, the statute does not cover damage or harm caused while operating motor vehicles, or acts of gross negligence, or criminal acts.
- f) The statute provides broad liability protection for radio amateurs in most situations, especially amateurs who volunteer under ARES when providing communications to served agencies.