

## Supporting Public Service Events—Part 1

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The military refers to communication as a "Force Multiplier." Military communication makes troops capable of performing as though they were a much larger force. With all the worthy charities around, and with all of us tightening up on our personal budgets, wouldn't it be nice to be able to come up with a "Donation Multiplier?" Here's how to do just that. If you're willing to invest some time, you can help produce huge amounts of money for worthwhile causes and have fun at the same time.

New Jersey amateurs have supported the community service and fundraising activities of charity organizations by providing radio communication to assure the welfare of participants and to coordinate the activities that must take place simultaneously to make the event successful. These events run the gamut from walkathons and bike tours to swimming races and parades. Each event has proven to be unique in its demands on the skills and ingenuity of the operators. And each has proven to be an important lesson in the continuing process of honing skills as communicators to prepare for emergencies we hope won't occur.

### Initial Contact

The first phone call or letter from the organizers of an upcoming event may be somewhat confusing or confused. Frequently they don't know how Amateur Radio will fit into their plans, but have been told that hams were helpful at some previous event. It's important to convey a positive attitude and to get as much information as possible about the nature of the event. It's important not to commit to the event until you're satisfied that it's an appropriate use of Amateur Radio and Amateur Radio operators:

- Do they truly need communication or are they just looking for a source of volunteer labor for other unrelated jobs?

- Is this truly a public service event or is it just a profit maker?

- Is the type of traffic to be handled appropriate to the Amateur Radio service?

Unless you see clearly that this event can't or shouldn't be supported by Amateur Radio, be upbeat and try to be helpful, but be clear that further contacts will be necessary to determine their exact needs and to come to an understanding of what roles your operators can and cannot play.

### Meeting with the Event Organizers

After the initial contact with the organizers, it's essential to meet for a more thor-

ough discussion so that you can get enough information to begin planning the communication network. Prepare your questions in advance so that you won't be diverted from getting all of your answers. Typical questions might be: Do you need voice communication, record traffic (a packet net) or both? How many locations will need communication? Will there be critical vehicles on the road that should be in the net? Who are your decision makers and where will they be during the event?

This is the time and place to make clear what your contribution to the event will be. Hams are communicators, willing and able to handle routine and emergency traffic to enhance the efficiency of the operation, and the safety and welfare of the participants. Amateurs aren't police officers, they don't direct traffic, they aren't delivery people and they don't make decisions for the organizers and sponsors. Hams don't "call the shots," particularly when decisions might have an impact on the profitability or reputation of the event or the sponsors. This last item is critical and points up the importance of having a decision maker accessible to the net throughout the operation.

This meeting is the time to steer their planning in directions that may have little or no impact on them, but can make communication significantly easier to plan or execute. For example, a long, narrow route is much easier to communicate over if the Net Control Station (NCS) can be established in the middle, rather than at one end. This may require a slight change in the location of one of their rest stops, but such a change should be comparatively easy to make early in the planning stages.

Above all, act in a professional manner when meeting with the sponsors. Hams are referred to as "amateur" radio operators, but no organization wants to turn over the success of its event to people who act amateurish. You've probably heard people quip that a ham will do anything for a donut, a cup of coffee and maybe a T-shirt. Amateurs can joke about this kind of thing to one another, but it isn't the kind of thing to joke about or mention to nonhams because they might think you mean it and misunderstand it to mean that they must somehow compensate amateurs for assisting with communication—a major "no-no"!

### Alternative Means of Communication

Charity organizations are sometimes offered use of cellular phones for coordinating events. It's important to articulate to the organizers the difference between phone service and net communication. If there's a message for a specific person or location where there's a cellular phone, a

point-to-point phone call may indeed be the quickest and best way to pass the message.

In public service events, the traffic is more likely to be of the type where a call on the net will produce instant results because all net members heard the call. For example, a call regarding the whereabouts of a person or a vehicle; or a net call-up for reports on the status of food and supplies at all locations could never be handled as quickly or efficiently by telephone because of the number of calls that would have to be placed. And this ignores the cost of cellular phone calls.

The organizers often don't know the difference between Amateur Radio nets and Citizen's Band (CB) operation. No matter how you feel about the subject, restrain yourself from being negative about CB operators, and particularly about the organization known as Radio Emergency Associated Communication Teams (REACT).<sup>1</sup> We've all had sad experiences with the CB service, but we're not always proud of what we hear coming over the amateur bands, either. Stick to what ham radio can do for the event organizers.

The complete communication network may include telephones, CB and local police or fire radios. My experience has been that the best way to integrate them is to *not* integrate them. Let each do its own thing, establish points of interface to pass traffic from one system to another as needed, and try to keep your operators from spending too much time trying to figure out why the cellular phones and the CBs aren't working. At a recent bike tour, I had to pass messages to ham stations asking tour officials at various locations to turn on their telephones. Then we had to show half of them how to operate them!

### Getting Operators

As a communication planner, it's necessary to enlist the help of numerous operators to construct the network. To attract the maximum number of volunteers, you must make the net flexible and you must be flexible in your planning. If someone wants to

<sup>1</sup>In fact, amateurs often take advantage of such opportunities to demonstrate Amateur Radio to CB operators first hand, and to help introduce interested, promising CBers to ham radio. Many skillful, respected veteran amateur operators got started in two-way radio with CB. REACT International (PO Box 998, Wichita, KS 67201), is a national volunteer organization with members in all 50 states that mainly uses CB radio to assist in providing public safety communication. REACT tends to attract the more competent and effective operators from the general CB population. Many local REACT groups have integrated licensed Amateur Radio operators into their operations.