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Second Century

Personal Preparedness

An area of amateur radio that is, by definition, an important element to the very existence of the service is emergency communications. I routinely remind hams to go to FCC Part 97, not just to know the rules and regulations, but to understand the why *of amateur radio. We do not enjoy access to such vast spectrum privileges without giving something in return. And part of what we give back is "value...to the public... particularly with respect to providing emergency communications," according to Part 97.*

ARRL operates the organization known as the Amateur Radio Emergency Service®, or ARES®. This is an effort to fulfill the mission set forth by the FCC in Part 97.1 by ensuring that there is a path for appropriate training, mentoring, exercises and practice, and reporting and analysis of overall preparedness. ARES is a great way to get involved in an organized program for emergency communications, but it is not the only one. SAFECOM has a wonderful set of resources that define the positions that require AUXCOMM training and how they fit into government responses to emergency situations. The Hurricane Watch Net provides another organized and trained group of amateurs who have the opportunity to assist the National Hurricane Center from hurricane-affected areas.

It is interesting, though, that the big story from last year was about a single radio amateur on a local repeater in Asheville, North Carolina, running an impromptu net collecting and passing vital information in the aftermath of a very unexpected disaster caused by Hurricane Helene. Although North Carolina is a very AUXCOMM-forward state, news stories did not emerge about trained first responders and AUXCOMM communicators. What did emerge were the stories of a volunteer who took on the task himself and ran with it. Does that tell the whole story? Of course not. But here's the big question: Could *you* have been that guy on the news?

Taking on the task of personal preparedness is a big deal. It is not simply buying equipment and keeping batteries charged. It is self-training on how the equipment works. It is creating operational checklists that you go over and over, once a week or more, to check into nets, pass messages on Winlink, ensure that APRS is working properly, and check on the effectiveness of your antennas as well as ensure that the assumptions you've made on *your* personal plan are still valid. Has something changed? Respond by updating your plan and checklist. When the time comes, whatever it is, and however much or little notice you have, your muscle memory will kick in so you're not trying to figure things out from scratch. None of this requires you to be a part of a large local organization, although with this planning and these skills, you'd certainly be taken seriously by the powers that be.

A member recently said to me, "G M aRen't uS" — a shot at the GMRS community. Are we making the very same mistake we made 50 years ago when millions of Americans were on HF with CB radio? Diminishing or belittling the people who get utility from their GMRS radios is a big mistake. The expression goes: All emergencies are local. When you're looking for information in an affected area, you want input from anyone and everyone you can connect with. I would encourage you to know two things: GMRS is about utility, not hobby. And GMRS users will likely fire up their radios during an event and could provide critical information to you in your emergency response. I encourage you to get a GMRS license and radio(s) and be that point of interoperability in your local community.

FEMA talks about being a "resilient citizen." Be radio active! Get yourself to a high level of personal preparedness. Be a connector! Look at all locals, including GMRS users, to make a robust community of emergency communications. Have other ideas, or you're already a pro at this? Get involved with ARES, and we'll be looking for your field report after the next event.

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