



COMMUNICATIONS

THE COMING STORMS

Hurricane Season

As we enter the 2006 hurricane season, organizations, special commissions, and state and federal organizations are still publishing reports on what went wrong during last year's devastating storms and analyzing the current state of preparedness.

The 750-page "Hurricane Katrina: A Nation Still Unprepared," issued in late April by the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, added some details to the now-familiar story. The panel found that back-up equipment arrived late or went unused, and private firms were often more adept at meeting the challenges than were state and federal agencies. One of its main recommendations calls for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to be dismantled and restructured.

The House is considering legislation to fix the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Policy-makers reviewed the proposed National Emergency Management Reform and Enhancement Act of 2006, a bill boosting FEMA's strength. The bill would beef up FEMA by creating the position of an undersecretary to head the agency. The bill would establish regional offices to coordinate efforts with state and local officials and emergency response providers, instead of having decisions come from Washington, D.C.

FEMA reports several major changes in preparation for hurricane season. Pre-positioning of commodities will be better coordinated with disaster-prone states, and the states are responsible for distribution. A new program for tracking inventory being trucked will use GPS to provide real-time location information. Special federal advance teams will be outfitted with video cameras to provide live feeds from a disaster zone back to headquarters. FEMA also plans to have trained 3,000 temporary workers by the end of summer 2006.

Some of the logistics, tracking, and rations are coming from the military, which says it will take its orders from FEMA. Logistics planning is done at the Defense Logistics Agency, based at Fort Belvoir, Va., and U.S. Northern Command, in Colorado Springs, Colo. will oversee the movement of troops, aircraft, vehicles and supplies supporting relief efforts. Improved communications

between local and national relief officials, including portable radio systems, are being readied, and a joint Air Force, Coast Guard and National Guard search-and-rescue center is planned.

The 53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron is the military's Hurricane Hunters, based at Keesler Air Force Base, near Gulfport, Miss., which is still recovering from Katrina. The Air Force is flying 10 new hurricane-tracking planes, the WC-130J model, with improved weather instrumentation and better crew comfort. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration flies its own hurricane-searching planes from MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Fla.

The state of communications interoperability in the coastal states and across the country is improving but has a long way to go. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff has said that successful interoperability requires three things: training on proper use of equipment, improved policies so commanders from different departments and agencies can communicate, and technology standards for equipment. DHS will be conducting a thorough review and report later this year. DHS has not completely endorsed the APCO25 set of standards yet because they are not complete. This month's *Scanning Report* ("Federal Report Cards," page 25) provides an excellent summary of the Department of Homeland Security's statements on interoperability and the First Response Coalition's review of communications preparedness in eight coastal states prone to hurricanes.

As always, to find the most up-to-date frequency information to follow hurricane-related communications activity, go to Hugh Stegman's *Utility World* site at www.ominous-valve.com/hurricane.txt

Amateurs at Work

The contribution of Amateur Radio Operators following the 2005 hurricanes was a noteworthy success. However, an ad-hoc ARRL National Emergency Response Planning Committee has been established in order to create a comprehensive recommendation for ARRL responses to large-scale regional, national and international disasters. The committee's mandate is not limited to hurricanes, so its membership includes individuals with direct field experience in all aspects of emergency communications at various levels during disasters including earthquakes, wildfires, floods and terrorist activity.

The ARRL encourages amateurs, "If you haven't done so already, take the Amateur Radio Emergency Communications Courses offered by the ARRL. Sign up with your local ARES group - ARECC certification is not a prerequisite, but you'll be a more valuable volunteer if you do."

New Mexico decided amateur radio is so useful, it has allocated \$500,000 to design, construct and install a statewide Amateur Radio emergency communication network. Early plans call for the

installation of strategically located, interlinked VHF and UHF repeaters to handle both voice and digital communication.

Moorpark High School, Ventura County, Calif., is offering the nation's first disaster-preparedness class, RADIO (Radio Amateurs and Disaster Operations). The year-long class will train students in CPR, first aid, student emergency response training, and amateur radio.

Storm Watching

Further inland, the threat of tornados is the bigger danger during storm season. Skywarn Spotters may be called out day or night year-round, gathering much-needed details of bad weather, including its aftermath. They fan out to assigned posts to scan the sky for signs of danger. Being a ham-radio operator is helpful but not a prerequisite to be a spotter. All you need is to complete a few hours of training led by a weather-service meteorologist, in which you learn storm signatures and cloud formations.

Local storms are initially tracked by the weather service's Advance Weather Interactive Processing System by radar. But the radar is beamed in a straight line, moving away from the earth's curvature, which means the only way to know exactly what clouds in the local area look like is for someone to be watching and reporting. To find a local group or training materials go to www.skywarn.org

Public Emergency Network

The Midland Radio Corporation, REACT International, the DC Emergency Radio Network, and NationalSOS.com have jointly announced their support for the National SOS Radio Network - www.NationalSOS.com - a free communications network based on the estimated 100 million FRS-compatible radios already in the hands of the public.

Whether the cause is a hurricane, tornado, wildfire, or spring flooding, when electricity, telephone and cell phone services fail, people are unable to let rescuers know of their emergency situations. The purpose of the National SOS Network is to connect Family Radio Service (FRS) and GMRS (General Mobile Radio Service) users with 700,000 ham radio operators.

The National SOS initiative recommends that the public use FRS Channel 1 as a primary emergency-communications channel. Channel 1 is easy to remember and has previously been endorsed by radio manufacturers and by REACT International. During a crisis, ham radio, GMRS and scanner operators can monitor FRS Channel 1 by listening to 462.5625 MHz. When a cry for help is received from an FRS radio, emergency responders can be notified.

Bill Adler, the founder of the DC Emergency Radio Network, DCERN, said, "It's my vision to see that every household in American has an FRS or GMRS radio." Adler continued, "The



idea behind this new emergency network is to have a simple, reliable communications system that doesn't depend on electricity or standing cell phone towers – and that anyone of any age can use."

For more details regarding the National SOS Radio Network, please visit: www.NationalSOS.com.

NEWS BITES

Goodbye, Vint Hill Farms

Vint Hill Farms Station, an outdated Army post located near Warrenton, Va., will "die" this fall, a casualty of the end of the Cold War. Why is this of interest to *Monitoring Times* readers? Because in 1984 the area around Warrenton was determined by a persistent *MT* reader to be the source of 4-digit English and Spanish "spy numbers" transmissions – a bit of a coup in those days of government denial.

Whether Vint Hill was connected to the National Communications System Warrenton Training Center to which the signal was tracked is unknown, but it seems likely. Acquired by the Army in 1942, Vint Hill Farms Station was used for intelligence-gathering operations and training of radio-intercept operators, cryptanalysts and technicians. The installation's mission focus changed in 1974 when it shifted toward research, development, and logistical support of intelligence and electronic warfare. It was placed on the Base Realignment and Closure list in 1993.

Employing more than 2,000 military members and civilians, most of its employees will be

transferred to Fort Monmouth, N.J., while others will be reassigned to Tobyhanna Army Depot, Pa., and Fort Belvoir, Va.

Senate and House Look at Telecommunications Laws

In early May, Ted Stevens, chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee, released a 135-page draft of the "Communications, Consumer's Choice and Broadband Deployment Act," a sweeping rewrite of laws dealing with video, satellite and broadband communications.

Stevens' proposal includes such contentious elements such as audio broadcast flag, broadband taxes, child pornography, municipal broadband, net neutrality, video broadcast flag, and VoIP providers. Stevens announced plans for two hearings, but the rewrite process is expected to be a long one.

Meanwhile, the US House Energy and Commerce Committee's version of the Communications Opportunity, Promotion and Enhancement (COPE) Act of 2006 "telecoms rewrite" bill is headed to the full House for consideration.

The House bill includes an amendment requiring the FCC to study the interference potential of Broadband over Power Lines (BPL) systems, proposed by Rep Mike Ross, WD5DVR (D-AR). The COPE Act BPL amendment adds a section (under Title V) to the proposed legislation that would require the FCC to study and report on the interference potential of BPL systems within 90 days of the bill's enactment. The Commission would have to submit its report to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce and the

Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation.

"This puts the House Energy and Commerce Committee on record as having concerns about BPL interference," the American Radio Relay League said. "If we are vigilant in protecting it against deletion on the House floor – assuming the bill is approved by the House – the BPL language will be included in the legislation that goes on to the Senate."

Night of Nights

If you're interested in the heritage and history of maritime radio, please draw a circle around 12 July on your calendars. That's the date of the 7th annual "Night of Nights" when KPH, KSM, and several other stations and ships will return to the air to commemorate the last day of commercial Morse in the US. Several of the ships and coast stations will be operating on MF as well. Watch the www.radiomarine.org website for an announcement with call signs, frequencies and time information. (Richard Dillman, W6AWO, Maritime Radio)

Historical Society)

Communications is compiled by editor Rachel Baughn KE4OPD (editor@monitoringtimes.com) from newsclippings submitted by our readers. Many thanks to this month's fine reporters: Anonymous NY; Harry Baughn, Martin Brooks, Mark Cobbeldick, Bob Fraser, Bob Grove, Sterling Marcher, T Martin, Jack Nesmith, Jerry None, Michael Perlman, Ken Reitz, Doug Robertson, Brian Rogers, Larry Van Horn, Ron Walsh, Ed Yeary

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