

## **Amateur Radio After Action Report for the December 4, 2008 Athens-Clarke County Community Wide Exercise**

### **Introduction**

The Athens-Clarke County Community wide live exercise was conducted on Thursday, Dec. 4, from 9:00 am to Noon. Participants included: Athens-Clarke Co. (ACC) EMA, ACC Police Dept., ACC Fire and Rescue, ACC Transit, Athens Regional Medical Center, St. Mary's Hospital, E.M.S., Community Connections, F.B.I., G.B.I., Northeast Georgia Public Health Division, East Georgia Red Cross Chapter, U. S. Navy Corp School Commands and Activities, University of Georgia (UGA) Police Department, UGA Hazardous Assessment Risk Team, UGA Security and Preparedness, Amateur Radio Emergency Service and Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service.

### **Exercise Scenario**

The exercise scenario took place at the Navy Supply Corps School (NSCS) and involved an explosive device along with the release of a toxic gas. The explosion occurred at Wheeler Hall during a community gathering. The objective of the scenario was to produce a Mass Casualty Incident (MCI) in which approximately 100 people were injured.

### **Community Objectives**

The Community objectives were:

1. To verify local Incident Management construct, including resource coordination and functionality of Unified Command.
2. To test the management of a MCI, and to identify areas for improvement while managing victims resulting from a MCI.
3. To test the management of a Hazmat incident with casualties requiring decontamination in the field.
4. To test interagency communication – specifically the movement of information from Incident Command (at the scene) to the respective Incident Command Centers established by the various responding agencies.
5. To test the various agencies abilities to coordinate information management.

### **Amateur Radio Objectives**

Amateur Radio operators set the following objectives for the exercise:

1. Test the ability to man all the served agencies with at least 2 amateur radio operators.
2. Pass traffic initiated by the served agencies.
3. Test the ability of the amateur radio operators to handle incident command, tactical, and routine traffic.
4. Test the performance of the installed equipment at the served agencies emergency operation centers.
5. Discover what is expected of amateur radio operators by each served agency during an emergency.
6. Test different EOCs in the Net Control Station position.
7. Test the *Amateur Radio Communication Plan for Region E Hospitals*.

## **Procedures and Evaluation**

The communication plan, as well as other information, was posted at n4zra.com before the exercise so that volunteers could become familiar with the communications plan. This included:

1. Information concerning the scenario from the Table top Exercise.
2. The *Amateur Radio Communication Plan for Region E Hospitals*.
3. The Participant Feedback form.
4. The Communication Evaluation Guide

Following the *Amateur Radio Communication Plan for Region E Hospitals*, the NE4GA repeater in Commerce was used as the main communication channel for the exercise. The net was recorded by Bob Herrin, KE4JLL, and David Radde, AE4GS for later review and instruction. A Communication Evaluation Form and Participant Feedback Form were developed by Ken Schroder, N4NFI. Evaluators were stationed at Athens Regional Medical Center, St. Mary's Hospital, Clarke County EMA, and the Northeast Georgia Public Health Division EOC. Participation Feedback Forms were given to each amateur radio and were filled out after the exercise.

## **Evaluation Results**

Areas that need improvement:

1. Call signs were overused. Tactical calls should be used with the call signs used at the end of completed traffic or every 10 minutes.
2. The Net Control Station did not move traffic between stations to another frequency so as to free up the main emergency communication frequency for other traffic.
3. The amateur radio operators had trouble passing traffic to the Athens Regional Medical Center Command Staff. A runner was used to carry messages from the Command Center to the radio room, however, the delay in receiving and sending traffic to the Command room needs to be improved.
4. The High Frequency radios at the Athens Regional Medical Center and the Clarke County EMA both had antenna problems.
5. The radio at St. Mary's Hospital was not operating properly. This could be an antenna problem.
6. Amateur radio operators had difficulty in determining when to use the Incident Command General Message Form.
7. Amateur radio operators had difficulty in passing traffic using the ICS-213 form and did not use the procedure outlined in the *Amateur Radio Communication Plan for Region E Hospitals*.
8. Phonetic spelling should be used to prevent spelling errors.
9. An alternate Net Control Station should be assigned at the beginning of the net.
10. An alternate frequency should be assigned when the net begins.
11. The ICS-213 form should be reformatted to include radiogram preamble.
12. Served agencies and amateur radio operators do not practice together enough on a regular basis.
13. Each EOC should have a list of amateur radio equipment and supplies.
14. Some of the stations need some more room for the amateur radio operators to work.

Areas of strength:

1. Communicators used basic principles of communications which guaranteed the passing of traffic with no errors.

2. The St. Mary's station had 3 amateur radio operators who were all unfamiliar with the station and net procedures. Despite the lack of training this station did an excellent job of operating, passing and receiving traffic.
3. Much needed discussion occurred at each EOC and many ideas were generated.
4. After some problems at first the served agencies corrected the format they were using and starting giving traffic to the amateur radio operators in a manner that made traffic handling easier.

### **Results from the Participant Feedback Forms**

1. The St. Mary's Hospital EOC has a high noise level and a lot of activity. This makes emergency communications difficult. Head sets are needed.
2. Assign experienced amateur radio operators with inexperienced operators if 2 experience operators are not available.
3. Training should be provided on the radio equipment at each EOC.
4. Provide training in the use of the ICS-213 General Information Form.
5. Replace the HF antenna at the Clarke County EMA with a an inverted Vee or hamstick antenna system.
6. Add message number, Priority, Received Time, Sent Time, and Date to the top of the ICS-213 form.
7. Check the St. Mary's station and correct the poor signal problem.
8. Amateur radio operators need more training on agency interactions and total response to disasters.
9. Amateur radio either was not needed or was underutilized.
10. Perhaps an Amateur Radio communicator at the incident site would have been helpful.
11. Amateur radio operators could use more net operations training.
12. Amateur radio operators need more message handling training.
13. Training needs to be provided to amateur radio operators in the form of a tabletop exercise.
14. Need more participation from served agencies.
15. Athens Regional Medical Center radio room needs more internal contact information.
16. Each EOC needs to have a file box with copies of the *Amateur Radio Communication Plan for Region E Hospitals*, ICS-213 Form, Radiograms, and station setup information.
17. The Northeast Public Health Division EOC needs:
  - a. To have a HF antenna installed.
  - b. The coax for the VHF/UHF station should be installed in a more permanent manner.
  - c. A PL259 to BNC converter should be kept on hand in case the base station should have problems.
  - d. The amateur radio station should be setup in a more permanent location.
18. Questions concerning activation of amateur radio operators need to be resolved for each served agency.
19. Need updated database of amateur radio operators for each served agency.
20. An external HF antenna needs to be installed at the Northeast District Public Health EOC.
21. Public Health should create a list of topics of interest for amateur radio operators. If traffic is passed between stations that include information of interest to Public Health it may not be passed to Public Health staff, unless communicators are aware it is of concern to Public Health.

22. Public Health staff should consider getting their amateur radio licenses and start getting involved in training nets.
23. Create a procedures notebook for equipment, net procedures, traffic handling, repeater listings, and contacts for each EOC.

The participation forms also included a section for rating and assessing the exercise with “1” representing “Strongly Disagree” and ranging up to “5” representing “Strongly Agree”.

Assessment of exercise:

| Assessment Factor   | Average Satisfaction |
|---|----------------------|
| The exercise was well structured and organized                                      | 3.5                  |
| The exercise scenario was plausible and realistic                                   | 4.0                  |
| Participation in the exercise was appropriate for someone in my position            | 3.9                  |
| The participants included the right people in terms of level and mix of disciplines | 3.6                  |

### **Other comments received via e-mail**

If internal communications fail at the Athens Regional Medical Center, it would be important to station an amateur radio operator in the EMS dispatch room. If communications with EMS fail, there is no way to communicate the situation at the disaster site, unless an amateur radio operator is sent along with the ambulance to report back what all agencies are doing. Each agency is doing its job by responding to the incident, but they may not be able to stop and communicate with other agencies.

### **Amateur radio operators, evaluators and other participants at the served agencies**

#### *Athens Regional Medical Center*

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#### *East Georgia Red Cross EOC*

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