Getting Started in Neighborhood HamWatch

Neighborhood HamWatch is a service program designed to support local neighborhood associations and community relief organizations. Through this program, there is considerable opportunity for radio clubs and individuals to support their local community in time of emergency. The idea is to provide both neighborhood and mobile gateways between community relief volunteers working in the field using basic two-way radio technologies and the more advanced capabilities of the Amateur Radio Service.

1. Participating in NHW means getting yourself ready to communicate during long periods of time when the power is out. What do you need to do that?

Standby power, generators and batteries – You don't necessarily need to keep your equipment up and running 24-7, but you will need enough capacity to operate for extended periods of at least several days. In some cases, commercial electricity is not restored for several weeks after a major disaster. Therefore, plan your standby power arrangement accordingly.

Recharging Capability – Renewable energy sources, such as solar or wind combined with rechargeable batteries can keep one operating indefinitely. Gasoline-powered generators are also useful, but it is important to have sufficient fuel on hand. In a major disaster, gasoline may be scarce or unobtainable. It may be best to use a gasoline generator to charge a standby battery bank rather than running a generator continuously to stay on-air.

2. In time of emergency, you will need the ability to communicate on both Amateur Radio frequencies and those of other radio services, usually GMRS, and FRS frequencies and/or CB Radio.

Neighborhood Association or Community Relief Groups will communicate internally using a basic two-way radio service. You will provide the "gateway" to local EmComm networks, the RRI/NTS traffic system, and perhaps other services such as Winlink and MARS. In this way, a request for emergency assistance may originate from relief personnel equipped with a simple FRS hand-held transceiver or a similar technology, yet be transferred to a more robust and flexible amateur radio network to get the message through. Because many of these basic radio services are low-power and short-range, the more Amateur Radio gateways dispersed throughout a disaster area the better!

Skills trump technology, therefore, the ability to use proper radiotelephone procedures is essential. Fluency in the ITU phonetic alphabet, the proper use of prowords, the ability to maintain circuit discipline, and knowledge of the radiogram format will be essential. As a gateway operator, you will set the tone for circuit discipline and you will be the example the community organizations will follow. The ability to function efficiently on both local EmComm nets and traffic networks will be key to successful operation as a neighborhood gateway operator. <u>Preparation in advance is essential as well</u>. Have the administrative tools ready. Keep message forms on hand, make a list of area EmComm and traffic net frequencies. Practice handling routine message traffic regularly to hone your operating skills.

3. **Local organizations, such as radio clubs and EmComm units** sponsoring the Neighborhood Hamwatch Program are responsible for recruiting gateway operators and developing plans for supporting neighborhood associations and community relief groups. In some cases one or two radio amateurs may be able to develop a program to support a small neighborhood or condominium association. In other cases, a radio club or EmComm unit will be better equipped to support larger groups such as Search and Rescue teams, faith based relief organizations or the like.

The sponsoring organization, using tools provided by Radio Relay International, is responsible for providing basic communications training to community organizations. Helping these volunteers understand the nature and limits of two-way radio methods, proper voice communications procedures and basic message formats will do much to ensure efficiency in time of emergency.

Ultimately, this program is designed as a "force multiplier." It eliminates labor-intensive one-on-one shadowing and facilitates a process through which fewer radio amateurs are needed to efficiently support a community relief organization. It is also designed to free up EmComm volunteers affiliated with ARES, REACT, AUXCOM and similar programs to concentrate on direct service to government emergency management and public safety organizations.

Ideal for Radio Clubs:

The Neighborhood Hamwatch program is an ideal program for local radio clubs (be sure to coordinate with your local EmComm groups). The local radio club can adopt neighborhood associations, scout troops, faith-based relief organizations or similar VOADs in their immediate service area. This gives the club a purpose and restores the once vital connection between radio clubs and community service, while freeing up local EmComm groups to concentrate primarily on emergency service organizations.

To accomplish this, your radio club should coordinate in advance with your local ARES®, REACT, AUXCOM or other emergency communications group to ensure recognition and to prevent duplication of resources.

Many basic training tools are available under the "publications" section of the Radio Relay International web page (www.radio-relay.org). These are available to assist in training activities and weekly or bi-weekly net operations.

Neighborhood Hamwatch is an ideal program for building goodwill with neighborhood associations and community groups. It is also an excellent opportunity for those with limited mobility to support local emergency response either from home or a vehicle. The radio amateur brings advanced skills to the emergency situation in the form of traffic handling experience and thorough knowledge of voice communications procedures while, at the same time, providing access to advanced networks such as the traffic system, Winlink, and local EmComm networks.

More information at: www.radio-relay.org