



Rick Palm, K1CE, k1ce@arri.org

## Amateurs Step In for Spate of Epic Disasters

**Amateur Service providers offer radio communications capability for responders and victims of recent disasters.**

An Atlantic hurricane season and western US wildfire incidents on a scale seldom seen have usurped the consciousness of the hemisphere. The amount of destruction has been matched only by the level of humanitarian response rallied for the millions of victims. This issue of *QST* has numerous other reports from across the disaster spectrum, compiled mostly by Contributing Editor Rick Lindquist, WW1ME, who has tirelessly investigated each story, contacting operators and managers in the trenches for a clear picture of the amateur response for the rest of us. The following additional accounts are also based on his excellence in digging for and reporting on them.

### **Amateur Radio Supports Partner and Other Agencies in Horrific California Firestorms**

More than a dozen lethal (at least 2 dozen killed, 150,000 acres involved) wildfires in northern California have damaged or destroyed cellular telephone and internet infrastructure in some areas, and Amateur Radio has helped to fill the communication gap. Mendocino County Sheriff Thomas Allman said officials relied on Amateur Radio operators for communication with area hospitals. Mike Carter, KC6MGM, a Mendocino County Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) volunteer, had staffed a station at Howard Memorial Hospital in Willits for 12 hours a day. Others

assisted with communication at other medical facilities and Red Cross shelters.

In Sonoma County, Sonoma County Radio Amateurs (SCRA) conducted an ARES® Fire Watch Net to relay fire

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and emergency information on its repeater. Auxiliary Communication Service (ACS) Radio Officer Dan Ethen, WA6CRB, said a controlled Sonoma County Fire and Emergency Services RACES/ACS net was also active. In Solano County, radio amateurs supported shelter operations. At one point, 59 Red Cross and independent shelters were open with 5,117 evacuees. California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection mobile communications centers (MCCs) were equipped with Amateur Radio stations.

The North Bay Amateur Radio Association's (NBARA) Gary Gross, KE6QR, recruited volunteers on Friday, October 13 to support the shelters housing those evacuating because of the Napa Valley Fires. Gross, an ARRL Official Relay Station (ORS) in the East Bay Section, said the specific need was for backup communication between the Crossroad Shelter in Napa, the Napa Community College

Shelter, and the American Canyon High School over the weekend, 9 AM until 6 PM each day.

"As soon as I finished copying the request for help, volunteers immediately started calling me, offering their services over the repeater," Gross said. "Now that's what I call real volunteerism; all positions were filled over the repeater via RF."

Volunteer operators worked 9-hour shifts at the shelters, with cross-band repeaters in vehicles, so that they could operate using a handheld from inside the buildings to reach the K6LI repeater. The cross-band repeaters were set up specifically for these field applications.

Other volunteer operators worked in conjunction with the American Canyon Community Emergency Radio Team (CERT), using the K6LI UHF repeater. FEMA reported that eight cell towers were offline, and that six of them would be offline long term due to extensive damage.

ARRL San Francisco Section Manager Bill Hillendahl, KH6GJV, reported that fire had returned to eastern Santa Rosa, not too far from his house, which he'd already left once, when flames from the Tubbs Fire got within two blocks of his house. He said, "I am at home providing media and public safety updates on the air, but if the fire comes across the valley east of my place, I'll be out the door again."

## Reports of Hurricane Devastation on Dominica Relayed by Amateur Radio

Hurricane Maria was the worst disaster on record for the windward Caribbean island nation of Dominica, 300 square miles with a population of some 72,000. (Maria also caused the ongoing major humanitarian crisis in Puerto Rico; the amateur response is covered elsewhere in this issue). In the immediate aftermath of then-Category 5 Hurricane Maria's passage over Dominica on Monday, September 18, Frans van Santbrink, J69DS, on St. Lucia checked into the VoIP Hurricane Net to relay damage reports she had gathered via repeater conversations with other hams there. *The New York Times* reported and posted audio that Amateur Radio was a primary source for gathering initial damage reports. US-based Jullian Antoine, J73JA, solicited reports via a VoIP connection with the J73MAN repeater on Dominica.

Brian Lloyd, WB6RQN/J79BPL, the Texas aviator who recently circumnavigated the globe following Amelia Earhart's path, spearheaded "Dominica Airlift — Angels to Eden" to aid the country's residents. Hurricane Maria left the country without power and telecommunications, and wrought severe damage to homes and infrastructure, including the island's port, but spared at least one usable airstrip.

Pilots with small aircraft were needed. "We have lots of people who want to donate supplies, but without the airlift going, the supplies can't get to Dominica," Lloyd said. He planned to take along portable satellite and HF radio gear to set up communication. In addition, he had an HF transceiver on his plane, *Spirit*, and carried a Micom 3 Fly Away HF radio with automatic link establishment (ALE) capability, to use as a portable disaster relief base station.

Amateur Radio volunteers living in areas having good signal propagation

into the Caribbean were asked to activate their home ALE HF stations to support the Dominica Airlift. Lloyd has a donated Iridium satellite tele-

phone with a small generator to power the communication equipment and to charge batteries. At least two other pilots were to assist.

## Global Effort to Restore Dominica's Amateur Radio Capabilities

The Yasme Foundation, Yaesu USA, the Foundation for Amateur International Radio Service (FAIRS), and individual GoFundMe donors joined forces to restore countrywide Amateur Radio communication on Dominica. Private pilots Brian Machesney, K1LI, and Dave Bridgham, N1AHF, took off on October 14 from Vermont with a planeload of Amateur Radio gear, relief equipment, and supplies to better prepare Dominica for disasters. Bridgham was a volunteer for the Dominica Angels to Eden airlift described above.

"Many of our members lost everything in the hurricane," said Joseph Raymond, J73RJ, President of the Dominica Amateur Radio Club Inc. (DARCI). "The donated equipment will dramatically improve our near-term ability to connect towns and villages all over Dominica, and to stay connected well into the future."

Yasme President Ward Silver, N0AX, said his organization began working with the Dominica Amateur Radio Club and Dominica's National Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (NTRC) last year to recruit and equip new ham radio operators for just such an emergency. "We are grateful to Yaesu, FAIRS, and the individual donors for joining us in this effort," Silver said.

Mikio Maruya, WA6F, Executive Vice President of Engineering for Yaesu USA's Amateur Division, said Yaesu "welcomes this opportunity to assist Dominica with its recovery from the devastation of Hurricane Maria."

FAIRS President Dave Larsen, KK4WW, pointed out that access to reliable power sources for ham radio equipment is often overlooked when preparing for emergencies. "The donated portable off-grid systems will help expand the coverage of Dominica's surviving repeater, permit 24/7 field operations by recharging batteries on handheld radios, and supply base stations in villages that are likely to remain without commercial power for some time to come," Larsen said.



Brian Machesney, K1LI, and Dave Bridgham, N1AHF, pilots for Dominica Airlift — Angels to Eden.