Working with Emergent Volunteers

A Reality: What We Will Need To Do
Put me in touch with reality? — Do you have something less drastic than that?
The purpose of this presentation is to identify, prioritize, and establish procedures for processing amateur radio operators that show up as emergent hams wanting to help or assist during an emergency.
It Will Happen Someday

- A Katrina sized event could impact OR
- Consider ratio of ham vs population
- Consider distance and geographic issues
- Consider served agency support
Someday Did Happen!

- Severe Weather Event - December 3rd to 9th, 2007
- 3 of 6 District-1 counties heavily impacted
- 24 hour a day continuous District-1 net operations
- 24 hour a day continuous EOC operations for impacted counties
Definition: Emergent Ham

- Volunteers who may not be associated with an organized volunteer group or may be separated from their established group
- These volunteers can be without training or will have an unknown level of training
- Not familiar with ICS & command system
- May pose a security risk
Planning Ahead

- Start developing your disaster volunteer team by tapping into volunteers you already have!
- But, make sure the structure is in place to help volunteers succeed.
- Don’t wait until disaster strikes to prepare volunteers for response.
- Planning ahead makes all the difference!
Before The Event

- Identify team to work with emergent hams
- Train to work with emergent hams
- Work with county officials on dealing with emergent hams
- Have a good solid process in place prior to any event
- Establish background check & ID requirements & procedures
Evaluate The Role Of Volunteers

- Clearly outline what volunteers will be doing
- What jobs will they be assigned? Develop clear positions and what qualifications are needed to fill such positions.
- Remember: There’s no such thing as “just a volunteer.” You will need to challenge them and hold them accountable.
- Create a structured program to help you maintain control of your volunteer program.
Serious Questions

- How many hams can you realistically expect?
- How serious will they be about working?
- Why are they volunteering?
- Can they prove what training they have had?
- Why haven’t they participated in ARES activities before now?
ARES Organization Prior To Event

● **ISSUE**: It comes down to one serious issue: How to handle, process, train, and supervise those that show up to help

● **SOLUTION**: prepare prior to an event, establish procedures & training plan, identify team leaders, and exercise your procedures & plan
Human Nature

- Many people don’t plan ahead, attend meetings, join clubs, or train
- Many people do think all they have to do is show up with their HT, a vest, & license
- Some think “I have been a ham for x # of years and that is all I need”
Important Things To Remember

- ARRL lawyers have decided you don’t have to accept every volunteer.
- A good screening tool at the very start is to have a list of minimum standards posted in some manner.
- Some people want to be in the middle of things and feel important but don’t have the skills to do the job.
Develop a Volunteer Application

- The application is your first screening tool
- Responses provided will help determine potential fit and possible roles
- Allows them to indicate areas of interest
- Job descriptions provide the basis for matching volunteers with job opportunities
Managing The Response Effort - 1

- We do not have an unlimited source of trained/qualified personnel
- ARES units are over-committed in what they can provide
- It is essential that all leadership be aware of the critical nature of utilizing assets properly
Managing The Response Effort - 2

- Leaders need to identify various strengths each person has and use these to enhance mission capability.
- Leaders need to recognize that some people just won’t fit in or work properly.
Do Your Homework

- Screen all potential volunteers
- Anticipate your screening needs and how you will handle the situations
- Learn how to identify false or suspicious identification
- Require references on your application
Safety Issues

- All volunteers will receive a general safety briefing and a specific safety briefing related to their assigned task or site.
- Track volunteer task schedules to ensure no volunteers work beyond their established shift (this is a mandatory safety precaution).
- Team leaders are responsible for task specific safety briefing.
Too Many MOUs

- During an event ARES support requests will far exceed available ARES resources
- Too many ARES units have MOUs with too many agencies
- **SOLUTION**: IF you have to have an MOU, have only one - with the county EM who is responsible by OR law for asset allocation
A MOU Reality

- Remember you can’t guarantee specific personnel or number of personnel to be sent
- Just say you will make every effort to provide personnel to meet operational needs as they become available
Served Agencies Can Help By . . .

- Receiving offers of assistance from volunteers
- Directing unorganized and untrained emergent volunteers to ARES team
- Providing food and shelter to volunteer workers as needed
Create a Written Volunteer Manual

- Provides a great training tool and serves as a good reminder of the rules
- Needs to grow as the program grows
- Should include information that will help volunteers feel “in the know” and enable them to succeed and stay safe
What to Include in the Manual

- List of supplies each volunteer should have
- List of supplies each team should have
- Rules and policies
- Important contact information
- Uniform requirements
- Organizational chart
- List of services your agency provides
- Sign-in procedures

- Where volunteers can or can’t eat or smoke
- How and when they should interact with the media
- How to handle grievances
- What to do if they are injured on the job
- A list of frequently asked questions
- A list of acronyms and what they mean!
Registration Form

- The volunteer’s skills inventory & training
- Personal information
- Emergency contact information
- Available equipment for operational use
- How many days available
- What hours can be worked
- Availability to travel
Screening Process

- Establish minimum standards
- Establish proper paperwork procedures
- Identify process team leader & team
- Identify team member assignments
- Coordinate with county EM’s office
- Identify a good site for processing
Volunteer Safety: Info to Record

- Emergency contacts
- Address, phone, e-mail
- Physician name and number
- Allergies
- Any other important information such as illnesses or conditions to be aware of
- Vaccination status & dates of vaccination (if involved in a health related event)
The SEC Said . . .

- Emphasize that all volunteer hours ARES or emergent must be tracked accurately and completely within 15 minute intervals in writing by name and location and general duty.

- We and our served agencies need this information during and after the event. If it is not documented it did not happen and we were not there. Pre-made forms for tracking are best. (ICS-211 and ICS-204)
A Danger To Avoid

- Don’t wait until the last minute to request manpower help from District or Section leadership
- Plan ahead . . . work with & communicate with senior leadership on a regular basis
- Work with adjacent county & district ARES leadership on a regular basis to insure a good exchange of information, a good working relationship, and to get to know them
OR Section
A Key Issue To Address

- **Paradox**: people’s willingness to volunteer vs. the system’s capacity to utilize them effectively
Orientation & Training

- Check with your regular people to see if they know the volunteers: good & bad points
- Have handouts ready to pass out with the necessary information so they can work effectively
- Establish a set format for your training session
- Keep training under 4 hours if possible
Key: What Is Supervision?

- Supervision is SUPPORT
- Don’t walk on eggshells with your volunteers
- Give them challenges and help them succeed
- Give volunteers feedback on performance
- If problems arise, address them immediately!
Supervise & Evaluate

- Monitor the volunteers well at all times
- Keep good notes on how they work
- Collect good contact information for recruiting after the event
- Monitor to insure volunteer isn’t overwhelmed or needs a break
Volunteers and the Media

- Maintain strict guidelines for volunteers on speaking with the media
- Stay a step ahead with the media. Keep them abreast of all the good you are doing
- Be proactive to prevent any potential disgruntled volunteer from turning the tables on you
- When making a media plea for volunteer help, be specific
Can You Fire a Volunteer?

In a word……..YES!

- How do you do it?
  - Base your decision on the volunteer’s performance & supervisor observations
  - Make it non-negotiable
  - Inform the volunteer privately
  - Explain clearly why
  - Keep a record
  - Inform staff and volunteers with whom they worked
Reassignment

- Sometimes it turns out the volunteer just isn’t suited for the job they’re given
- If they’re a good volunteer, consider moving them to a different volunteer position
- Be sure to train them for the new job!
- Training & initial screening is a key issue when it comes to duty performance
During The Event

- Pair up volunteers with qualified ARES personnel
- Be selective in where you assign volunteers
- Be selective when you assign volunteers
- Don’t hesitate to remove the volunteer if they become a problem
Key Emergency Management Concept

- Span of control is critical in emergencies
- Never manage more than five to seven people in a disaster operation (3-5 is better)
- Operate under ICS guidelines
After Action Thoughts

- What is or will be the impact of the volunteers’ work in or on your unit
- Did the volunteers cause any issues that have to be addressed
- Evaluate the volunteer’s performance with your team for future recruiting opportunity
- Check with served agency personnel for their input about the volunteers
Recognize Your Volunteers

- Say “THANK YOU!”
- Point out a specific accomplishment
- Make them a part of the team
- Plan for post-disaster recognition
- Think about recruiting good volunteers
- Treat them well and they will come back
Overall Keys to Success

- Good communication up & down the chain of command
- Set and use guidelines and policies
- Strong leadership (incident command chart)
- Volunteers must understand and respect the chain of command
Key Thoughts To Remember

- Cohesive team work is paramount
- Leadership & supervision is critical
- Pre-organized preparation is a must
- Plan for volunteer needs and then plan some more
As Bad As It Was Or Can Be, Life Goes On
For More Information

Contact:
David Kidd, KA7OZO
DEC, Oregon ARES District-1
ka7ozo@arrl.net