

No "Shake Ups" during Weekend Communications Drill

Local News

Posted by: David Haviland

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MONTESANO, Wash. - On Saturday Dec 12, 2009 Grays Harbor County Emergency Management with the assistance from the Grays Harbor Amateur Radio Club, Washington State Emergency Management Division, Lewis County, Mason County, Pacific County, Bay Center, Wa Fire Station, the American Red Cross, Centralia EOC and the District 3 Net Control held a disaster communications drill.

The drill was a severe earthquake that impacted the entire County. Westport Fire Chief Dennis Benn and the Deputy Director of Emergency Management for Grays Harbor County worked in the Emergency Operations Center (EOC). Members of Grays Harbor Amateur Radio Club manned the Ham Radio during the event and had to operate with only **one person**. In a true disaster event, on a weekend, having 3 people to run the entire event is acutely possible. Participation from the other Ham Radio operators gave the EOC a communicated status of the County with a collapse of the WalMart Store, a Collapse of a Fire Hall in Pacific Beach, bridge failures, landslides and a tsunami wave in the Westport/Grayland area.

The drill was very insightful and actually brought about interest in conducting another drill based on this same scenario but begin it at hour 12 into the event.

Special thanks to Doyle Wentzel & George Stone from the Grays Harbor Amateur Radio Club for assisting in putting the Communications Drill together.

Thank you all for assisting Grays Harbor County Emergency Management and the Grays Harbor Amateur Radio Club in the Communications Drill on Sat. Dec 12, 2009. It was a very insightful drill which actually opened our eyes to a few things that we could do a bit better.

- 1) We have decided to make a template to distribute to all of the Amateur Radio Operators which would provide a blueprint of the essential information that is needed by the EOC in a disaster event, which could be transmitted from any remote location.*
- 2) We have decided to continue into phase 2 of the drill (probably in spring) where we will begin at hour 12 in the event. Then, at a later date, we will drill from hour 48 -72.*
- 3) Our goal was to get a communicated picture of the status of the County which **actually happened**. We were able to ask for assistance from the State EMD for a collapse of a WalMart full of shoppers and finally ended the drill with a 2nd aftershock which forced us to abandon our site and asked the State EMD to designate another neighboring County site to run our operations. (These events could definitely happen in a severe earthquake)*

We worked with bare bones personnel, just as would likely occur on a Saturday morning. Discussion took place on how slowly information would likely come in to the EOC. It would increase stress levels of the workers knowing something disastrous happened and that we couldn't really assist in any way. (One scenario was a landslide where 3 cars were pushed into the river). It

would be hard to operate knowing we couldn't contact local officials to let them know of the situation.

Again, I thank you for all of your assistance. You are an integral part of any disaster event. The assistance from all of you is invaluable to me in my position and to Grays Harbor County in the protection of the citizens who live here. Great Work!

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