

Emergency Preparedness Exercise Los Angeles County, California. WaveTalkers Live Episode 40

Take Away from listening to Episode by Julia Allison

If you are not aware of WaveTalkers it is an Amateur Radio Zoom meeting each Sunday at 3pm central time. They discuss topics for ham radio and emergency communications. As September is Preparedness Month, yesterday they shared about an Interoperability drill that was for all of Los Angeles County the past week. WaveTalkers do have a YouTube channel, and I would recommend checking it out. Definitely watch this episode for a bigger picture than I am providing.

Los Angeles County is 4735 sq. miles, there are 88 cities. They have rugged mountains, deep canyons, vast deserts, and beaches. And for ARES and Emergency Services they have three main events - earthquakes, wildfires, and floods.

They can have more than one emergency at a time such as last week when they had wildfires and then rain with flooding. It may seem a good mix but mud became an issue with trying to get to and deal with the fires.

There is also the issue that disasters don't respect jurisdictional boundaries. So they wanted to have an exercise with all of the county's emergency agencies participating and working on working together.

The scenario was that there were high winds which took down power lines which caused wildfires. An event that could easily happen in the real world for them.

They have multiple ARES groups in the county and different cities have their own ham radio operators, as well as many other entities. So their goal was to staff as many bureaus and battalion headquarters as possible and move information from the Four Bureaus to Battalions. Many of these Bureaus act independently in emergencies, so this exercise was to work on working together to get information out and interact with other EMCOMM organizations in the county.

There were setups at fire stations, on mountain tops, and in many different places around the county. Because of the topography to get information around, they had to use every form of communication that can be done by Ham Radio.

I want right now to just go to their take aways from the exercise. I thought that some of this advice would be good for even Lee County though we are on such a smaller scale than they are.

First. They used the exercise as a training exercise for new radio operators. They could learn a new part of radio communication during an exercise before something real world happens. So new people were taken under the wing of the old heads and learned a job over the day. Even just to talk on a radio.

Second. One station, Los Angeles Fire Department Axillary Communications Services, was passing information without a repeater. They would get information in by Winlink then pass it on. One thing these guys at this station did that the others thought was a great idea was that they had a small simple black and white printer connected to the computer. When a Winlink message came in, they would print it and then pass it to the proper person to then pass the message on by voice. They were moving information quickly this way.

Third. Setting up with and where was best. Some of the fire stations are quite small so it worked better setting up in a nearby parking lot. Also in one place, one guy was using the battery of an electric car for power while sitting on the ground. The guy with him was set up in the back of his pick up.

Fourth. One of the gentleman commented that he has pretty much never participated in an exercise that there didn't happen a real world event. Properly one says, "Real World Event" when breaking into the normal exercise chatter. At this event there was a set up on a mountain that has many hikers and bikers. Near the end of the day they heard screaming and a mountain biker had gone down. There was no cellular in the area, so they were able to pass on the call to the emergency services while with the diversity of people they had up there, one was a RN so she gathered up medical kits and went and stayed with the biker until emergency services arrived.

Fifth. Many played the event as it was meant so left their phones in their cars. They played it for real that everything was down. A good idea when doing an exercise for an emergency situation.

Sixth. One guy was working in his mind a better difference between the Go Bags and Go Kits. A Go Bag is what you grab when you have to run quickly and is packed and ready. The Go Kit is everything you through in your truck as you leave that you may need on site. Then the term Drop Case. There was a group that had gater boxes and these guys could drop it on a table and be ready to go in minimal time.

Seventh. I liked this idea that one mentioned. They used to do training where four people would sit around a table and practice Net Control and passing traffic between each other before actually trying it on a radio. Also hands on in small groups to learn and work out things. Such as. How to set up and get going quickly (something that should be practiced over and over again), Also learning to work Winlink while sitting together and going over it face to face before needing to try and do it in the field. Winlink can do different things depending on a lot of variables to lots of practice in a group can help one be ready for the variables.

Eighth. Need for consistent protocol in how to speak. Such as when to say your station call sign and then who you're calling. Also there will be issues with dealing with other entities who have their way of saying things. There can be a difference in how each responds and sometimes it can get confusing and sometimes the ARES person needs to accept how the other one does it whether it makes sense or not to the Ham operator.

Ninth. You will never know everything that is going on. You have to be comfortable with only knowing what you are dealing with and not what is happening somewhere else or does not have to do with what you are communicating. You don't need to know what is happening in any other place. Best way to help who you are helping is to concentrate on their needs only, not the big picture.

I hope this is a help to others and can be used in our own practice for the emergency that may come our way.