

DON'T YELL AT ME, I'M A VOLUNTEER!

OBSERVATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

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Let me preface this by saying that it is not my intention, overtly or implied, that I criticize nor disparage the efforts that have prevailed programs created past or present. Any remarks, recommendations and observations made by me is based upon 50+years of experience and education gleaned from being a volunteer and as a professional public servant.

I, and some of my peers, have this unique perspective of experiencing this noble effort as a recipient in volunteer status and as a proponent in paid status. As a volunteer fire fighter/ambulance driver I learned early on what training is needed and what "training" is inadequate. One of my early evaluations was to see how I could drive a van ambulance at high speed with lights & siren on a two-lane blacktop country road with no traffic. The result was "you passed, now you're an ambulance driver, here's your pager, you're in the on-call rotation". Juxtapose that with professional firefighting

training I received from 20yrs service in the US Navy. I received extensive training in aviation and shipboard fire techniques, both utilizing methods of classroom and a mix of hands-on reality. Add a dash of volunteer fire training from two different states companies and I felt confident that I could handle myself in most fire scenarios. That was even more reinforced with the survival training I received in my last state assignment.

Now where communications enter into, is not unique by itself. Public Safety Radio training early on was much like my ambulance driving. “Here’s the on/off/volume, squelch, channel selection; leave it on CH-1, don’t set to any other channel”; – no explanation as to what the other channels were used for. There were exceptions, notably APCO on the national level and custom trainings at a local level. Civilian communications were worse in many respects. Exceptions were the Public Service organizations such as CB REACT, ARRL-ARES, MARS, CAP & USCG Auxiliary and organized Amateur Radio Clubs where one could find an Elmer

to guide them in basic and advanced radio practices. Good operator procedures were outlined even though some were geared towards HF radio and not necessarily tactical. Long before the CERT became a household word, those other organizations were already on the job. The issue is if they were not a part of the served agency they were considered “outside” and did not receive the formal training nor recognition that was afforded to the new CERT Program. Many served agencies had the attitude of; “if they’re not part of the solution, then they are a part of the problem” and “if they’re not sworn, they’re not born!” Part of the problem was marketing. Educating the public as well as served agencies that may or may not have allowed participation. The other problem was identification.

In 1983 California, following some hearings into the emergency communications posture of the State Office of Emergency Services, the Legislature mandated that State OES hire a specialist with a proven track record in the RACES and Emergency

Broadcast System programs. This was done in 1985 with the hiring of my predecessor & mentor Stan Harter (KH6GBX) [SK] as the statewide program coordinator. In about 1989 or so Stan was hosting a group of professionals from New Zealand. Stan was explaining the alphabet soup of these adjunct communications volunteers and specifically the R.A.C.E.S. program, when one in the group asked what a “Racist Radio Officer” was. Even when explaining the R.A.C.E.S. Radio Program to local served agencies we had a difficult time explaining the service. Stan knew right then & there that a new term must be introduced in order to educate non-radio folks on the function of volunteer radio communications. In 1993 we changed the name of California’s State RACES to the ACS – the Auxiliary Communications Service. The name ACS better represented all the communications volunteers in government service. The original premise of ACS was to include ALL communications organizations and methodologies.

The genesis of EMCOMM dates back to the rudimentary days of radio whereby mobile & portable devices were few and far between. Some examples of early EMCOMM activities were the 1936 Johnstown Pennsylvania – FLOOD. When WWII broke out for the United States entry, the FCC halted all Amateur Radio communications. The War Department and the Civil Defense discovered a need for communications both active and passive, strategic and tactical. So, in June 1942 – WERS (War Emergency Radio Services) was established by FCC. By August 1942 ARRL began publishing WERS information articles in QST. WERS was disbanded by 1947 however a gap in public safety communications became a concern relative to the new threat of the Cold War. In 1952 the R.A.C.E.S. (Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Services) was established by the FCC with concurrence by the ARRL. Section 97.407 was included in the Federal Register with its roots in the WERS of the 1940's. RACES is another radio SERVICE such as Marine Radio, Amateur Radio & GMRS.

Perhaps now is a good time to discuss the difference between Public Safety and Public Service Radio Communications.

I learned many years ago that there is a difference, however, the operational principles are the same if conducted correctly. Public Safety Radio is defined as that entity that is directly involved and charged with the life-safety of the public using Law Enforcement, Fire & Rescue, Emergency Medical and Emergency Management disciplines. The methodology or equipment type is inconsequential to this definition. A Reserve Communications Team using Amateur Radio in a support role to a served agency such as a Emergency Management organizations should be considered a part of the comprehensive Public Safety Radio *AUXILIARY*. Public Service Radio is defined as the organization that may assist a government entity or a non-government organization (NGO) in providing communications for special events that are not necessarily directly related to life-safety but could be. Do both of these terms cross-

over? Yes, and in some cases at the same time. A Communications Team doing a Coffee Break at a rest stop, as REACT used to do, or providing data for a Red Cross shelter is considered Public Service. However, in either one of these examples, if the Team is activated by the served agency (not the NGO) then they could be considered as providing Public Safety communications albeit in a logistics form and not necessarily in a tactical reference.

Liability must enter into this conversation now. When the volunteer is considered a part of a government entity then the volunteer should be covered under that agency's liability & workers compensation. This should be no different than a Reserve Police Officer/Deputy Sheriff or Volunteer Firefighter. Thus, it is very much recommended that the volunteer assigned to a served agency be included in those classifications. An EMCOMM Team attached to a served agency should be considered as part of that served agency. They should be afforded the accessibility to

include vetted profiles with Agency ID Cards and rights & responsibilities afforded any Reserve Unit within that agency. While engaged in activity for an NGO such as the Red Cross, then it is that organizations responsibility to provide liability. In other activities it may fall upon the Amateur Radio Club or ARES Team to provide a bond to cover liabilities. Sponsorship by an umbrella organization that may have 'employed' your group should be a determining factor.

Just because you are a licensed Amateur Radio Operator doesn't mean you know everything about radio and in particular Public Safety Radio. Another instant consternation is telling a Public Safety official that you and your equipment are here to "save the day" and your \$45 Baofeng is better than that government's multi-gazillion dollar communications system. "Better" is subjective, different perhaps, more versatile indeed and obviously less expensive, but does it meet or exceed the commercial FCC specifications for spurious emissions and other interference issues.

I can emphatically say that in California, if you are a part of a served agency in an EMCOMM Unit, do not show up on a SAR or Fire with a Baofeng radio, you will be asked to put it away or, if you're lucky you may be issued an approved radio from a cache. Civil Authorities, treat your volunteers as "unpaid professionals" in communications – albeit a "Communications Reserve" much like CERT, Volunteer Fire, Reserve Law Enforcement Officers. And referencing training, don't expect the volunteer, who may happen to be an Amateur Radio Operator, to immediately be able to communicate on a public safety radio without some formal training. Also be aware of your dispatcher's union rules and what and when a volunteer can conduct "dispatch" type communications. To this topic, Incident Dispatching is different than Communications Center dispatching. It is important that volunteers in Public Safety communications utilize the ICS and other local PS procedures as outlined in that served agency. As you should be aware of, the minimum participation in ARES now is the FEMA ICS 100, 200, 700 & 800. Some jurisdictions may require additional modules in

order to participate or 'promote' into more responsible positions or tasks. Formal training is acquired through the CISA AUXCOMM Training Program.

Several times I have been the recipient of discrimination, as a volunteer and as paid peer to senior public safety officials. Some of those officials have been burned by a volunteer organization or an individual that left a bad impression on not only the official but on the entire volunteer program to the point that the program became non-existent. Leadership & Management of volunteers is a skill that can be learned but must be practiced constantly. Candidates should be coached that they are expected to accept responsibility and that the served agency is seeking volunteers with dedication, commitment, and skills who are in it for the long haul. Nineteen out of twenty potential applicants choose not to join. Agencies should emphasize that their volunteers produce; that they are not ID card collectors and joiners. Served Agencies recruiting

volunteers should inform them that they are employees, albeit unpaid, and will be treated as such.

A volunteer does not need to be a “joiner” just to get as many ID cards on a lanyard as possible, as in the movie ‘FLETCH’, where Chevy Chase’s character does just that in order to make an impression. Similarly, the worst turn-off to Public Safety officials is to show up like a “ham” at a radio convention with ID cards, name plates, patches, a belt load of handheld radios (all turned on & yakking). We do not believe in signing up volunteers for the sake of creating a list of people who MIGHT be available to do SOMETHING. Served Agencies might consider eliminating even the word "volunteer" when describing your EMCOMM Unit. Why? Because for one, the word "volunteer", for numerous reasons, is almost a dirty word with some government officials and for the second, the word denotes something less than a professional or employed person.

With the maturity of EMCOMM, the inclusion of AUXCOMM Training, ICS and Task Books “Volunteer” has a better chance of being accepted within the ranks of the paid professionals serving Government.

Hopefully I have enlightened you to some principles, however, I’ll leave you with this.....

“Stepping stones and stumbling blocks are essentially the same material, it just depends on how you use them!”

Thank You.

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