

August 20, 2008

To The Editor:

September has been designated as "National Preparedness Month 2008" by the US Department of Homeland Security's Ready Campaign, and the Orange County Radio Amateurs (www.ncocra.org) are pleased to be an official member of this year's national coalition. Of course, amateur, or "ham" radio, has been actively involved for a hundred years now in providing emergency communication by wireless networking, and OCRA, our organization, was formed fifteen years ago for the very same purpose.

This year's campaign encourages citizens to take four preparedness steps: (1) Create an emergency supplies kit, (2) Make a family emergency plan, (3) Be informed of emergency situations that are likely to occur and the appropriate ways to respond to them, and (4) Get involved in helping your community prepare for disasters. More detailed information on these four "bullets" can be found on the official website at www.ready.gov/america/npm08.

We ham radio operators know that the communications infrastructure is one of the first lifelines to fail when a disaster hits. Unfortunately, the present day dependence on cell phones only makes things worse. While your cell phone will do just fine during a fender bender, the cell phone network will become overloaded and inoperative almost instantly during any sort of serious, widespread emergency. Your old fashioned wired phone line would be a bit better in that regard, but many people are discontinuing that service as a cost saving measure.

One means of communication that will still work is amateur radio, which essentially doesn't depend upon infrastructure for its operation, and as the 2008 OCRA President, I encourage you resourceful folks to study for and obtain a ham radio license. It's easier now than ever before to become a ham radio operator. The Morse Code requirement was deleted as an exam item over a year ago, and you can prepare for the 35 question, multiple choice written exam by studying material that is found on the internet. Our organization can help you understand the test material and then become a proficient radio operator once you've passed your exam and have your license. I would in no means be stretching the truth by saying that one trained ham operator, in the right place at the right time, can save lives, because it's happened before and will surely happen again.

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