



UNITED STATES COAST GUARD AUXILIARY
Eleventh Coast Guard District, Southern Region
Communications Department – William H. Scholz, DSO-CM

P.O. Box 1694, Upland, CA 91785
Email: dsocm@d11s.org **or** w1hijcw@aol.com
909-608-9181 (**Voice**), 909-985-2563 (**Fax**), 714-292-4271 (**Cell**)

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TO: DVC-OT, DCO, VCO, OTO, ADSO-CM's, SO-CM's (D11s), CAP
Composite Squadron 68 Officers, other interested parties

FROM: Bill Scholz, DSO-CM (D11s)

SUBJ: Interagency Emergency Comms Drill, this date

SUMMARY:

On this date, an emergency communications drill was conducted using the VHF Repeater, Marine VHF, landline, cell phone, amateur radio repeaters, and internet chat room media. Between 25 and 30 stations participated including all media. 8 Divisions were represented. The Divisions which chose not to participate were 1, 2, 7, and 14. Divisions 9 and 10 were exempted from participation because of the inability to work through the VHF repeater. In addition to USCGAUX participation, Composite Squadron 68 of the California Wing of the Civil Air Patrol also participated. The drill lasted for approximately 3 and ½ hours.

DRILL PLANS AND OBJECTIVES:

The plan for the drill was to establish an Incident Command System style of communications and structure, pass traffic between stations, and integrate the Civil Air Patrol into the drill.

Specific objectives and goals were to:

1. Test our ability to establish and operate an ICS style structure;
2. Test our ability to gather district wide data via the ICS and report it;
3. Test our ability to integrate another agency into the activity; and
4. Test our ability to use multiple communications media simultaneously.

SCENARIO AND TIMELINE (ALL TIMES LOCAL) FOR THE DRILL:

1200 -- Notify Station Los Angeles and Group LA/LB of the drill

1400 -- Announce opening of Drill on "AUXNET" repeater, named drill "READY"

1415 -- Take check in's by Division

1425 -- Establish ICS structure and appoint IC, Comms, Operations, define callsign structure to be used.

1430 -- "Ready IC" makes first request for information: A list of all "Mobile ACU's" which would be available for assignment on 28 July. Requested data was (by Division) # of ACU's, hours available by unit, comms capability (VHF Marine, AUXNET repeater, HF), and expected location of each available ACU for the hours reported.

1430 to 1530 -- "Ready Comms" gathers data using various media from Division representatives.

1500 -- "Ready IC" assumes guard for AUX vessel, A241, which is conducting a Catalina Safety Patrol.

1530 -- "Ready IC" makes request of "Ready Operations" for status of all AUX facilities (Vessels and Aircraft) currently operating under orders in LA/LB and San Diego AOR's.

1530 -- Station LA and "Ready IC" loses comms with A241 using Marine VHF, AUXNET Repeater, or cell phones. IC requests Coxswain of A241 to activate a "practice" Emergency Locator Transmitter being carried on the vessel.

1535 -- "Ready IC" requests direction finding assistance from Composite Squadron 68 of California Wing of Civil Air Patrol. CAP IC and "Ready" IC establish a private internet chat room for non-radio comms regarding search. "Ready" IC now using three radios, two telephones and internet chat room simultaneously.

1545 -- "Ready Comms" reports results of ACU information request to IC.

1545 -- "Ready Operations" reports result of request on facility status to "Ready" IC.

1548 -- "Ready IC" establishes comms for "ops normal" reports with A241 on a "ham" repeater. (Permission had been previously obtained from the control operator and owner. Both IC and A241 used their personal amateur radio callsigns). Ops and Position information for A241 relayed to Station LA via Marine VHF. Ready IC now using four radios simultaneously.

1550 -- CAP IC dispatches a mobile ground-based direction finding team from Dana Point area. Ready IC provides latitude and longitude of A241 as "last known position" (LKP)

1600 -- Ready IC releases Ready Comms and Ready Operations and informs division representatives that they are released from drill if they so chose.

1610 -- A241 is again within range for use of Marine VHF Channel 83A. Station LA does not respond, Ready IC maintains guard, but using 83A and AUXNET repeater on a 30 minute schedule.

1625 -- CAP IC reports via internet the first plot of a direction finding "cut" on the ELT.

1640 -- CAP IC reports via internet the second plot.

1650 -- Ready IC receives, via email, a map showing all "cuts" on ELT, along with times and locations of the measuring station.

1710 -- After "discussion" in internet chat room between Ready IC, CAP IC, and CAP Squadron Comms Officer, the decision is made to terminate the search based on the fact that reliable comms with A241 are now available and that direction finding "cuts" and lat/lon from A241 are in agreement. Private internet chat room closed.

1720 -- A241 enters home port, requests permission to secure patrol. Ready IC grants permission and declares that "Ready" drill is now terminated.

CONCLUSIONS:

All four of the drill objectives were achieved.

Coverage of the District was less than desired. Despite email notification to all SO-CM's and posting of drill announcements and information on the District Communications website, four of the 12 Divisions which should have access to the AUXNET repeater and to Marine VHF frequencies chose not to participate.

LESSONS LEARNED:

1. The Incident Command System functioned as desired. The two stations ("TP", Shirl Lehman; and "FE", Victoria Jacobs) assumed responsibility and successfully completed their tasks despite not having any prior notice that they would be requested to take on the tasks.
2. One of the strengths of ICS was demonstrated by the fact that for the drill, we had only a "virtual" operations center. There was no single location in which all concerned parties could gather. Geographically, the drill "ops center" was located in Upland, Marina del Rey, Whittier, Westminster, and Mission Viejo.
3. As a group, we need more practice in use of the ICS structure on the radio. Admittedly, it is difficult to shift "identities" on the fly. Especially when there is a requirement to identify one way on one frequency and a different way on another. There was some confusion as to the correct callsign to use. Practice will assist in eliminating this issue.
4. More attention needs to be paid to careful, controlled speaking on the radio. More than once the IC ("EE", Bill Scholz) mis-spoke when making requests or giving directions and that led to unnecessary communications requesting clarification.
5. Incorporation of another agency, CAP, was remarkably painless, especially considering that the decision as to how they would be incorporated was not made until only 3 or 4 days before the drill took place. Their professionalism, the "just get it done" attitude, and their use of internet technologies was a valuable lesson to us all.
6. Internet technology for comms and mission management was demonstrated to be of significant value. As a District, we should examine this capability for its application in our regular operations.

Please accept my personal thanks and those of the USCGAUX for your participation in this drill. Over the past several months we have progressed substantially in our ability to carry out emergency communications in a tactical environment. There is still much to be improved upon, but I am very proud of the progress you all have made.