It's NIMS Time!

Unless you have been totally out of touch with your local emergency coordinator or radio officer, you are probably aware that as of September 2006 all emergency management staff, which includes amateur radio operators, were supposed to be certified in at least three National Incident Management System (NIMS) courses. Some areas of the country have been given additional time to meet the NIMS requirements. This month we take a look at NIMS and the forms that go along with the Incident Command System (ICS), which is the local version of NIMS.

NIMS is a comprehensive, national approach to incident management that is applicable at all jurisdictional levels. The intent of NIMS is to be applicable across a full spectrum of potential incidents and hazard scenarios, regardless of size or complexity. It is also intended to improve coordination and cooperation between public and private entities in a variety of domestic incident management activities.

NIMS provides a flexible framework that facilitates government and private entities at all levels working together to manage domestic incidents. This flexibility applies to all phases of incident management, regardless of cause, size, location, or complexity. If responders come in from a neighboring town, county, state, or from across the country, NIMS provides a set of standardized organizational structures, as well as requirements for processes, procedures, and systems designed to improve interoperability.

NIMS is comprised of several components that work together as a system to provide a national framework for preparing for, preventing, respond-

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ing to, and recovering from domestic incidents. These include: command and management; preparedness; resource management; communications and information management; supporting technologies; and ongoing management and maintenance.

According to NIMS, preparedness activities are conducted on a "steady-state" basis, well in advance of any potential incident. Preparedness involves a combination of planning, training, and exercises; personnel qualification and certification standards; equipment acquisition and certification standards; publication management processes and activities; mutual aid agreements and Emergency Management Assistance Compacts.

Resource management will define standardized mechanisms and establish requirements for describing, inventorying, mobilizing, dispatching, tracking, and recovering resources over the life cycle of an incident.

Communications and information management has a standardized framework for information-sharing support at all levels of incident management. Incident management organizations must ensure that effective, interoperable communications processes, procedures, and systems exist across all agencies and jurisdictions. Information management systems help ensure that information flows efficiently through a commonly accepted architecture. Effective information management enhances incident management and response by helping to ensure that those making decisions are better informed.

Technology and technological systems provide supporting capabilities essential to implementing and refining NIMS through voice and data communication systems, information management systems, such as recordkeeping and resource

Shawn Shenton, KC0LZE, in background (center) giving ARES members instructions for the exercise described elsewhere in the column. (Photo courtesy of Kris Krengel, KB0YRZ)

tracking. Finally, ongoing management and maintenance make sure that people and systems are ready to respond.

How Do Hams Fit In?

Emergency management officials have told most amateur radio groups that they must take and pass courses on ICS Introduction (IS100, IS200) and the National Incident Management System (IS700). For those working in an emergency operations center the National Response Plan (IS800) is also required. Specific courses may vary a bit around the country, so check with your local emergency coordinator or radio officer. The first three courses should be able to be completed over one weekend.

Today amateur radio operators providing emergency communications need to have a real commitment to their area of interest. They must be trained and have a good attitude. With the Incident Command System being implemented there is very little room, if any, for walk-on operators. Bucks County

(PA) Amateur Radio Emergency Service operators found themselves using the Incident Command System during a July 4th parade.

Within ICS, the primary area of interest to amateur radio operators is the logistics Section and the Services Branch Communications Unit. Normally the primary served agency will contact the amateur radio emergency coordinator and advise him/her of the nature of the incident and where to report. This could be the emergency operations center, the command post, or the staging area. Here the Logistics Chief or the Communications Unit Leader will fill in the hams with information on the incident. A properly trained ham may be asked to function as a leader in the Incident Command System. This individual will have to be familiar with the Incident Command Structure, forms, methods, and procedures.

As people respond to help in an area that is not local to them, there is often considerable confusion in the operational performance of major incidents. Regardless of who the Incident Commander may be and regardless of what agency the per-

Michigan Ham Gets President's Award

White House photo by Kimberly Hewitt

On September 8, President George W. Bush presented Greg Ybarra, N8HXQ, with the President's Volunteer Service Award. Ybarra, of Flint, Michigan, is a volunteer with the Genesee County Amateur Radio Emergency Services. He was nominated by the county's emergency management and homeland security director, Grace Ranger, who is also a licensed ham.

Ybarra has been a ham radio operator and volunteer with the Genesee County Amateur Radio Emergency Service (GCARES) for 20 years. Volunteers with GCARES are on call 24 hours a day to provide supplemental communication for first-responder agencies including hospitals, 911 centers, emergency management offices, and fire departments. Volunteers are also utilized during search-and-rescue operations and large community events. As the Emergency Coordinator, Ybarra is in charge of training programs for more than 100 volunteers. He also teaches ham radio classes free of charge to children and

adults. In addition, Ybarra is an active volunteer at St. Agnes Catholic Church, where he serves on the Spiritual Development Committee.

When asked about the Award, Ybarra told the *Flint Journal,* "It was kind of like the duck on water. Your feet are going a hundred miles an hour, but it's nice and calm outside."

Ranger said, "There are a lot of worthy volunteers out there, there really are, but he is really among the top of them."

Ybarra, meanwhile, applauded the efforts of the others who work on the emergency services team. "Grace and her team are remarkable," he said. "If an event like Hurricane Katrina happened up here, I've got a lot of confidence in Grace and her team that a lot of the problems that happened down there wouldn't even come close." In 2003 Ranger was named Professional Emergency Manager of the Year in Michigan.

In his January 2002 State of the Union Address President Bush called on all Americans to make a difference in their communities through volunteer service. He created USA Freedom Corps, an Office of

the White House, to strengthen and expand volunteer service. Americans are responding to the President's call to service. Go to <http://www.volunteer.gov> or call 1-877-USA-CORPS to find an existing volunteer service opportunity in your area or to find more information about service programs, including national service programs such as the Peace Corps, AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, and Citizen Corps. The President's Volunteer Service Award was created at the President's direction by the President's Council on Service and Civic Participation. The award is available to youths ages 14 and under who have completed 50 or more hours of volunteer service; to individuals 15 and older who have completed 100 or more hours; and to families or groups who have completed 200 or more hours.

To thank them for making a difference in the lives of others, President Bush honors a local volunteer, called a USA Freedom Corps Greeter, when he travels throughout the United States. President Bush has met with more than 500 individuals around the country, such as Ybarra, since March 2002.

Tami Yorks, KC8YGS, Genesee County Office Emergency Management Program Manager; Maria Ybarra (wife); Greg Ybarra, N8HXQ; and Grace Ranger, KC8BOE, Genesee County Emergency Management/Homeland Security Director. (Photo courtesy Greg Ybarra, N8HXQ)

The Arapahoe County ARES group has its Incident Communications Plan partially filled out based on the group's emergency communications plan. (Courtesy Arapahoe County ARES)

son is with, it becomes his/her responsibility, along with his/her staff, to coordinate the on-scene operations of the incident. When an incident crosses jurisdictional boundaries, another part of the NIMS/ ICS comes into play, and this is known as the unified command. This command process allows multiple jurisdictions to develop strategies for the overall incident. However, the primary Incident Commander is still in charge and is responsible for the overall outcome.

NIMS and the Incident Command System do not change the procedures used by amateur radio operators. The various amateur radio nets will still run the same, and the FCC rules and regulations are unaffected by NIMS and the ICS. The primary differences are some of the nomenclature (who's called what) and the forms used for written messages and other purposes. As amateur radio operators participate in drills and other forms of training, they should add NIMS and the ICS programs to their already valuable skills.

In Littleton, Colorado, 17 members of the Arapahoe County ARES group participated in a training event created by Training Officer Shawn Shenton, KCØLZE, to build upon items that could use some improvement from the 2005 Simulated Emergency Test. The goal was to have ARES members practice radio programming, map reading, communication skills, and basic Incident Command System procedures. Members were given a radio frequency to program and would establish contact with a designated individual. The members were then given a new frequency and location. The member would have to program the radio and use a map to determine the location of the designated contact, drive to the location, and find the designated contact.

According to David Markham, KCØVES, a loose ICS command was set up. He said, "Members tracked their time and information on their own ICS 214 form." The ICS 214 Unit log form is used to record information received or

transmitted and any actions taken by the unit and resources. Markham says the Arapahoe County ARES group has been using some form of ICS for about the last 10 years. "We try to use ICS forms as much as we can during events and trainings. The ARES group provided communications following Hurricane Katrina, when Colorado participated with Operation Safe Haven. During the event, amateur radio operators from around Colorado assisted state and local officials by providing communications for evacuees at a receiving site. Operators from five counties worked 12 to18 hours per day for two weeks providing communications between the State Multi-Agency Coordination Center/Emergency Operations Center, Aurora Fire/Police, Arapahoe County Sheriff's Office, Buckley AFB, and various voluntary organizations, including the Salvation Army and the American Red Cross."

Form Usage

Bucks County ARES members commented how useful it was to have someone writing down information while they were operating the radio during the July 4th parade. They worked closely with the local CERT Team (Community Emergency Response Team). The CERT members wrote down the information while the radio operators tended to communications. One advantage mentioned is that the CERT team knew the local neighborhood better than many of the hams who had traveled into the area. Here's a list of ICS forms that were used during the parade:

ICS 201 – Incident Briefing Form. The Incident Commander briefed the participants prior to assignment.

ICS 202 – Incident Objectives. The Incident Commander stated the objectives of the parade, which included reporting on the progress of the parade utilizing the BCARES radio system and the ICS forms.

ICS 203 – Organizational Assignment List. The Incident Commander identified the various Unit Leaders.

ICS 205 – Incident Communications Plan. The Communications Unit Leader identified the radio frequency and assignment for the various users of the radio system for the incident.

ICS 210 – Resource Status. The Resource Unit used this form to advise the Situation Unit of the status of a resource.

ICS 211 – Check in List. The Re-source Unit identified all resources assigned to the incident.

ICS 213 – General Message Form. Used by all units in the Emergency Operations Center for the written transmission of information from one unit to another.

ICS 214 – Unit Log Form. Used to record

information received or transmitted and any actions taken by the unit and resources.

ICS 215 – Operations Planning Worksheet. The Incident Commander and the Communications Unit Leader identified resources required for the event.

ICS215a – Incident Action Plan Safety Analysis form. Used by the Incident Commander to identify potential threats (heat and oncoming storm) for the participants in the exercise.

ICS 216 – Radio Requirements Worksheet. Completed by the Communications Unit Leader.

ICS 221 – Demobilization Check out form. Used as resources were released from the exercise.

The key to using the forms was accountability. They provided knowledge of what staff and radio equipment were being sent to a particular location. Members of the local fire departments said it is much easier to work with volunteers whom they know have incident command knowledge. With all of their other responsibilities, it is just one less item they have to worry about.

Hurricane Preparedness Limited Action

This has proven to be a rather quiet hurricane season so far (as of mid-September). Ernesto came ashore in North Carolina between Myrtle Beach and Wilmington. Although still classified as a strong tropical storm, there were numerous wind gust readings in the 80-mph range, which is just above hurricane strength (to be classified a hurricane, a storm must have *sustained* winds, not gusts, of 74 mph or greater). While there wasn't much wind damage, there was inland river flooding.

The North Carolina Eastern Branch Amateur Radio Operators were activated on August 31 for storm Ernesto. Communications were used on UHF, VHF, and HF between the 31 counties of the Eastern Branch and the rest of North Carolina. Although the night operation was fairly light, by daybreak various teams from North Carolina Emergency Management (NCEM) were tasked to see what possible damage there was and what help was needed. A fast-water rescue team from Ashville was sent to an area where their 800-MHz trunking system, cell phones, etc., did not work. One member of that team, Sean Hayne, KG4UCX, had a 2-meter handheld radio with him. The branch emergency operations center and the fast-water rescue team were able to maintain communications at all times via amateur radio. NCEM dispatched the team to another location where cell

George Reidmuller, NØNJM (left), and Dan Meyer, NØPUF (right), completing ICS Forms as part of their participation in the Incident Command System. (Photo courtesy of KBØYRZ)

George Reidmuller, NØNJM, completes his Unit log (ICS 214). (Photo courtesy of KBØYRZ)

phones were reliable and ham radio was no longer needed, but remained as a backup. Initial information about shelters being open, roads closed due to flooding, and power outages was reported via ham radio. With normal communications being restored, the amateur radio operators were able to secure by 4 PM.

As Ernesto hit the southeastern U.S. and Hurricane Florence came near Bermuda, both the Hurricane Watch Net and the VoIP Weather Net gathered information and relayed it to the National Hurricane Center. Julio Ripoll, WD4R, and John McHugh, K4AG, WX4NHC Coordinators at the National Hurricane Center, were very appreciative of the efforts of the VoIP Hurricane Net and Tony Siese, VP9HK, who provided excellent reports of what was happening on Bermuda. According to Rob Macedo, KD1CY, Director of Operations for the VoIP Hurricane Net, the last report before the net secured indicated that an estimated 25,000 people were without power. Tony sustained damage to his HF antenna. Hurricane-force wind gusts were recorded on the western parts of the island. Tony remained without power at his location per his last report.

Bernie Nobles, WA4MOK (left), and Dave Pulver, KG4CZV, relay important information from the Eastern Branch EOC communications room. (Photo courtesy of Ron Knapp, W9EF)

"The logs are closed for this session," said Ron Knapp, W9EF, Assistant Section Emergency Coordinator for the Eastern Branch of North Carolina, "but the ARES hams are on standby for the next time."

TSA Puts MARS Plans Into Effect

As Ernesto approached the United States, Army MARS members were busy making preparations for possible hurricane support for the Transportation Security Administration. TSA officials in Washington, Atlanta, and Miami worked with upper level MARS staff to make sure communication needs were being met. As those plans were being worked on, MARS callsigns were starting to be deployed to several airports. According to postings on the web, the Federal Security Directors at John F. Kennedy, LaGuardia, and Newark Liberty International airports in metropolitan New York City have been assigned MARS calls. The assignment of callsigns was thought to be a step in making various locations more easily identifiable.

With Thanks…

This month we introduced you to the Incident Command System and some of the forms that are being used. It is clear that the ARRL Radiograms are not going to be as useful in an Incident Command System operation. However, the skill of passing message traffic will continue to be beneficial.

We want to thank Bucks County ARES for sharing their participation in a parade using the ICS system, David Markham, KCØVES, and Bill Morine, N2COP, North Carolina Public Information Coordinator for the ARRL.   73, Bob, WA3PZO