

Operation Deep Freeze

This information is for a Simulated Emergency Test and not an actual emergency!

Date and Operational Time: The Simulated Emergency Test (SET) will be held on February 28th from 0800 until 1300 hours local time. This drill will be a combined Skywarn and Amateur Radio Emergency Communications training event. From 0800 until 0900 the traffic will mainly be in support of Skywarn activities and at 0900 rescue and recovery activity and traffic will begin. Both Skywarn and EMMCOM activities will run concurrently.

Goals: The primary goal is to test and improve emergency communications capability of Amateur Radio. Secondly we want to enhance the working relationship between Amateur Radio and served government and volunteer agencies. This testing will be under simulated emergency communications conditions that are realistic for the location and season of the drill.

Participants:

Agencies: The drill will includes such agencies as the National Weather Service with their Skywarn program, the Virginia Department of Emergency Management, county and city emergency groups such as E-911, rescue squads, search and rescue groups, fire departments, and hospitals. Volunteer agencies such as Red Cross, Salvation Army, Southern Baptist Disaster Relief, CERTS groups, and VOID etc may elect to participate by contacting Glen Sage at 276-398-3548 or email me at w4ghs(AT)arrrl.net.

Amateur Radio groups: Groups that may wish to participate is any group or individual that feel they can profit from participation and may include RACES, Skywarn, ARES®, clubs, hospital communications support groups or associations, etc.

Scope of the Drill:

As was stated in the goals, this is a communications drill and will not involve the moving of resources that might be requested from the impact area. The exception is radio operators that will be moving to the agencies they will be serving. Radio operators that volunteer from distant points outside the impact area will volunteer on the basis of availability but will not deploy. If you are backup, you will not deploy but will communicate your willingness to do so. Participating agencies in the impact area may choose to open their building to radio operators and they may choose to remain for observation or responding to messages sent to their agency in a way that would reflect an answer that would be given if this was a real event as opposed to a test. If an agency chooses not to remain throughout the drill the ham will generate the answer to traffic. In real events hams do not generate

traffic or generate a reply to messages. This would be the role of the responsible agency person. Hams will be answering pseudo messages to prevent agency people from having to remain for the 5-hour period if they choose not to stay.

The Event:

This will be a dangerous winter storm that will move in from the west and will impact the high elevations of the mountains of NW North Carolina and Southwest Virginia. Ice and freezing rain will overspread the entire area in the early period. This will lay a layer of ice over everything. Then the rain will change to heavy wet snow over the area west of the Blue Ridge. East of the Blue Ridge at the lower elevation freezing rain will continue with the increased building up of ice on power lines, phone lines, TV cable etc.

On the Blue Ridge, above 2000 elevation the layer of ice will create hazardous driving conditions. There will be multiple auto accidents on I-77. These traffic tie-ups will extend from exit 1 at the VA/NC line to the East River Mountain tunnel at the boarder of VA/WV. The East River Mountain and Big Walker Mountain tunnels are both 4 lanes for over a mile long beneath the two mountains. Tractor trailers trapped inside the tunnels will have to turn their engines off due to carbon monoxide problems. Once their engines and fuel lines become cold, restarting the engines will become problematic.

When the freezing rain turns to heavy snow, the blocked traffic will block VDOT snow removal equipment from entering the Interstate for snow removal. With no snow removal the heavy snow will continue to pile up during the duration of the snowfall. With I-81 and I-77 being one and the same through much of the Wytheville area, traffic will also backup over long stretches of I-81. Travelers along I-77 would number 80,000 plus over the 80 plus mile stretch. This will become the longest parking lot in the Commonwealth. People would soon begin to seek improvised restroom facilities along the Interstate with injuries beginning to occur with people trying to make their way down near vertical banks through deep cuts and fills on the roadway. Primary roads intersecting with the Interstate would be open but hazardous to travel. Stranded vehicles along the Interstate would try to run their engines to keep warm. Those that fail to keep snow from around their exhaust pipes will experience medical problems. The exit spacing is exit 1, 8, 14, 19 etc. Those walking from the mid-point between exits will be exposed to the elements for a number of miles and will suffer from exposure, hypothermia, and possible frostbite, along with possible injuries from falls. Exhaustion will occur when people try to navigate the deep snow along the Interstate to exits. As vehicles are abandon on the Interstate snow removal would be further delayed due to congestions.

The residence of the impacted area would begin snow removal of this heavy wet snow. This effort would place an increased demand on medical facilities due to heart related problems from manual shoveling or walking long distances through this heavy snow. Those at elevations above 4000 feet might confront as much as 25% more snow, higher winds and lower temperatures than those between 2000 and 4000 feet. Those living east of the Blue Ridge will be confronted with a different set of problems.

Rather than snowfall, those living along and east of the Blue Ridge will see not only the early icing conditions but also this freezing rain will continue through out the storm. Temperatures prior to the moving in of heavy freezing precipitation, will be below freezing so this abundant moisture will contact wires, trees and structures that will allow the building up of ice on everything that it contacts. This heavy build up of ice will be followed by high winds. The major problems from these eastern locations will be the loss of power, telephones, cell phones and hazardous driving conditions. This would extend from the Blue Ridge to the western edge of Halifax, Campbell, and Botetourt counties. East of this area, the band of precipitation will be minimum.

Groups in areas east of this precipitation band that wish to participate would do so in the role of providing needed help for the impact area. As supplies and skills are requested from those impacted by the storm, please offer only those items that would be located at your home, agency, or jurisdiction or can be obtained. If you simulate operating from an area that has lost commercial power, operate only if you own battery, or generator power that would allow you to operate. You are not required to fire up your generators but one needs to be available at that location. If power is lost in your area, use only repeaters that are listed in repeater directories as having emergency backup power. If you have Internet service that is connected to phone or cable connections that would have been taken down by ice or wind during the storm consider that service as being unavailable. If you are using a Winlink gateway that is connected to the Internet via a phone line, or cable, consider your gateway as being down. If you are connected by a satellite you should have both Internet and gateway available in this storm if you can get to your dish to keep it clear of snow or ice buildup. If you are in the impact area consider your cell phone as being out. Even if the tower system were up, the influx of calls would create problems (with 80,000 trying to use their phones along I-77).

In the areas of heavy snowfall (west of the Blue Ridge) first responder's repeaters would be considered as being operational. The area in need of Amateur Radio is connecting agency-to-agency, vehicles transporting motorists from the Interstate, connecting triage areas at each exit together along with shelters and hospitals that choose to participate. Amateur Radio will be providing communications to agencies of support outside the area of impact. Amateur Radio would also keep agencies in the impact area informed of the status of simulated incoming supplies and personnel. Ham radio will provide interoperability wherever it would be needed.

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More will follow as needed