

Simulated Emergency Test

2006- Blacksburg NWS Coverage Area

"Operation North Wind"

9 December 2006

After Action Report – Kathleen Becker WB4HQW

This portion of the exercise was to simulate lost hikers near the peak of Whitetop Mountain. The participating individuals consisted of: Kathleen Becker WB4HQW as the amateur operator with a hand held radio with a broken mike and friends Faith King and Donna Denham. The small red vehicle in which we traveled was left parked at the trail head of the Appalachian Trail. In an effort to misdirect the rescue operation, the vehicle was parked at the trail head that departed to the East rather than the Western Trail. In addition, a topo map was left on the dash board of the vehicle with the eastern trail outlined and a factitious area outlined with a red X on a hill to the east. It was expected that if anyone in the rescue party had undergone BSAR training, that clues from the vehicle may have been examined to help determine the hikers intentions. We were requested to report to Buzzard Rock with the coordinates of N36.63481 W081.61670. However, due to the relatively cold environment with a direct prevailing wind (for real), the group elected to move position south to be more in the sun and out of the wind behind some rocks. This new position was N36.63402 W081.61732. The group was in final position at 0904 hours.

At this time, the amateur operator began sending an open carrier signal (CQ in code) on both 146.58, and, with no response, repeated on 146.52 every five minutes. At 0944, Whitetop Search Base (KG4AVH) indicated on 146.58 that they had just received the notification that there were lost hikers on Whitetop Mountain. Search Base indicated that a field unit (KB4ZC) would be deployed up the mountain to locate us. All communication henceforth was on 146.58 simplex. Questions were asked by Search Base to the lost hikers and an open carrier response was requested which would consist of a number of presses of the mike button to coincide with the appropriate answer. Some of the questions consisted of: "Was the red car the vehicle from which we traveled?", "Do you need medical assistance?", "What direction from your vehicle do you recall that you departed?" In addition, on a number of occasions, the lost amateur hiker was requested to maintain an open carrier for 15-20 seconds to allow for direction finding by the field search team.

The field search team, along with a number of local firefighters, found the lost hikers at 1124. At that time, the group advised the search team of the medical problems of the hikers. (Broken or sprained ankle of one hiker, heart problems with unresolved angina even with four nitro tablets by a different hiker.) This information was relayed down to Search Base. (Note: None of the firefighters who were in the search party had medical training (either EMT or Paramedic) and none had Basic Search and Rescue (BSAR) training.)

Following "rescue", the hikers checked in at the Mount Rogers Fire Department which was where Search Base operations were conducted, took a brief tour of the equipment being used for APRS, and checked out shortly after noon to return to Floyd Virginia.