

OCTOBER 4, 2003 DISASTER DRILL

On October 4, 2003 the local Amateur Radio Club along with the Amateur Radio Emergency services held a Simulated Emergency Disaster Drill. The Galax Grayson Carroll Wythe Chapter and the Smyth County Chapter of the American Red Cross were invited to participate. The purpose of the drill was to determine the capability and effectiveness of their communication system and to educate the agencies being served by these groups. Forty eight radio operators were stationed at eleven strategic areas including the 911 center, the Command Center and the Blacksburg Weather Center. Roanoke Blood Services was manned by two operators and a packet was sent to the State EOC requesting a disaster declaration. Each station was given a list of six items or service to be requested during the drill. All communications were routed through the Command Center. The following pertains to Red Cross and does not include transmissions for the other areas.

We went on the air at nine a.m. and at 9:40 a request for a shelter at Gladsboro was transmitted. Carroll Co. Dept. of Social Services was deployed for registration and a shelter manager was sent from Surry Co. Medical personnel were on hand and the cafeteria personnel handled mass care. They elected to use athletic mats on a temporary basis. At 10:30 a.m. calls began to come in for Health & Welfare. Find four unaccounted for persons. These calls continued through the day with a total of 26 persons to be found. This did not include the 20 hikers lost in the National Forest. Elk Creek Rescue Squad requested 30 blankets. We sent these by the transport team. Smyth County Red Cross requested 200 water purification pills. They were referred to the Smyth Co. Health Dept. for instruction and information on their water situation. Cana Rescue Squad requested 20 clean up kits. We were able to send these as the water had not then covered the roads. Laurel Fork opened a shelter. We were able to send a shelter manager and mass care staff. They had medical assistance. They also requested two grief counselors. Their attempt to deploy was hampered by a mother bear and her cub. Ultimately they were able to reach the shelter. After being lost over night in the National Forest, 20 hikers were located and their physical condition evaluated by a Paramedic. All were transported to Smyth Co. Hospital. Cana requested a generator and one was taken to them by the Hillsville Fire Dept.

As more urgent weather reports were coming in from Blacksburg it was apparent that we would need more personnel. The Smyth County Exc. contacted the Bristol Police Dept. who in turn contacted the Mountain Empire Chapter. They contacted the lead chapter who made arrangements for State personnel. (ie Mass care, shelter operators, family service and ERVs. Roanoke blood service recruited 17 EMTs for medical assistance. Carroll Co. and Galax City Dept. S.S. staff were sent to the outlying areas.

At 2 p.m. a declaration of national emergency was made and the National Guard was activated. As the water continued to rise bridges were washed out and roads were impassable. Boats and helicopters were needed to rescue some individuals from the East side of the city. Shelters were opened at Grayson Co. High School and Hillsville United Methodist Church. Wythe Co. Social Services came to Independence and Elk Creek to assist. Cana requested 4 mass care cooks, but only two were available. Contacted Surry Co. Red Cross to recruit 2 more. Laurel Fork requested 10 flash lights. Informed to go to Dollar General in Hillsville. They will bill Red Cross. Get a bill of sale. At 2:55pm Cana reported that they had cell phone availability and land lines. They were released from the exercise.

The weather station reported the the run off from New River was going into Claytor Lake whose dam had been topped and probably would not hold Laurel Fork Rescue reported receiving a group of individuals who were dehydrated and needing fluids. Referred them to Tri Area Med Center. At 4pm all Health and Welfare cases had been closed and all requests had been completed. We were advised by the Command Center that we could discontinue operations.

At the evaluation of the drill it was felt that the Red Cross Chapters participating had performed well, offering good input professionally and in a timely fashion.

