

DON'T JUST DO SOMETHING -- SIT THERE!

By KAY CRAIGIE KC3LM, in EPA FEEDLINE, JULY, 1989

You have just tuned onto a frequency and hear a situation in progress. You don't know what is going on. What should you do? First, turn your VOX off. Then:

1. **KEEP QUIET.** Don't ask what is going on. Don't ask if it's real or a drill. Don't offer to help. Don't answer questions, Don't relay. Don't tell other people to shut up. Don't ask weak stations to say again. Don't ask where this repeater is located. Don't ask if your friend Alonzo who used to live up this **way** has checked in because he had a real good signal on this band back in 1956. **KEEP QUIET.**
2. Tips #2 through #9 are the same as Tip #1.

3. If, after carefully listening long enough to understand what is going on, you discover that you can definitely be of specific assistance, check in at a time when it is not disruptive of the ongoing activity on frequency. If Net Control asks for stations in Guatemala or the Yukon, it is disruptive to check in from Bushwhack County. After acknowledgement by Net Control, return to following Tip #1 until asked to transmit again.

Of course, we can't hear the 500 operators who're following Tip #1, only the dozen who don't -- so we can't gauge the true percentages. However, it only takes a few people to cause serious, maybe even dangerous, delay in a real emergency or to turn a drill into a farce.

THOUGHTS ON DISASTER TRAFFIC-HANDLING

By KAY CRAIGIE WT3P

Whether it's Hurricane Andrew, a California earthquake, a major industrial accident, or some other disaster, hams outside the stricken area want to help. Sometimes we're approached by frightened people wanting word on friends and relatives in the disaster area. We may get phone calls from the news media looking for a local angle or "hook" for the story.

What should we do, and not do, when a disaster strikes somewhere else, if we really want to help those most in need? The answer isn't mysterious, once we pinpoint who is "most in need."

The news media and the frightened people calling us on the phone are not those most in need! They're just scared, or they're just doing a job. The people in the disaster area are in actual danger, so they are most in need.

What do they need most from ham radio? They need hams in their local area to provide emergency communications for the agencies that are protecting their lives and property. Hams engaged in that critical work don't have time to chase ail over creation trying to locate a thousand Aunt Susies in who-knows-which Red Cross shelters. Hams should not be hogging the phone circuits trying to ring a thousand Uncle Freds, when those lines are needed for essential emergency-management communications.

Experienced hams in disaster areas often put premature welfare inquiries aside, until the situation cools way down. By the time the hams can attend to those inquiries, those who sent the messages have often already heard from their loved ones.

Once we understand what hams are needed for in a disaster area, it's clear why welfare inquiries should be postponed until well after the hot phase is over. Sure, that's when relatives and the media are the most anxious for us to do it, but we should resist *and* describe to them how hams are truly busy helping people survive the disaster. The relatives will often be understanding. The local media may go away grumpy, because they're deprived of their sensational or sentimental story hook. That's tough!

If we go on TV and say that ham radio's main role in a disaster is finding out about the welfare of individuals, we're distorting the true importance of ham radio in emergency communications. That's not good for ham radio, and it doesn't help the people who need our help the most. The October 12, 1992, issue of *THE ARRL LETTER* details what hams really did as "first responders" in Dade County, Florida. It's an impressive story that puts welfare inquiries in their proper perspective. Need convincing? I'll send any MARC member a photocopy of the issue for an SASE.

Operating Guidelines

1. **Listen.** Monitor recognized disaster net frequencies. Transmit *only* when directed by a net control station, or station in the disaster area.
2. **Monitor W1AW** for timely bulletins (*they're on WB3JOE packet, as well as on HF*).
3. Hold off on **health and welfare traffic**. Don't clog primary disaster frequencies by trying to force H&W traffic into the disaster area. Amateurs' efforts must be directed to receiving messages *from* the affected area, each one having the potential of heading off numerous H&W messages. U.S. Amateurs must listen carefully for instructions on handling H&W traffic when the disaster is in another country.
4. **Control** of the communications situation belongs with Amateurs *in the affected area*. Act according to directions of designated net control stations,
5. It is the responsibility of the **Red Cross** to manage the H&W traffic function (the Red Cross term is "Disaster Welfare Inquiry"). Hams support the Red Cross communications network, not the other way around.

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