

## *Disasters can happen...*

When disaster strikes, communication becomes even more critical than usual, but is often disrupted by system overload or equipment outages. That is when the trained radio operators of the Auxiliary Communications Service are a priceless asset to the community, assisting Fire, Police, and other agencies with essential emergency communication. Sign up as an ACS volunteer to participate in this rewarding application of amateur radio.



Smoke from the Grand Prix fire darkened the skies as ACS members continued to provide communication support from the Rancho Cucamonga Fire District's fully equipped CS-180 Communication Van.

## **Auxiliary Communications Service**

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## **AUXILIARY COMMUNICATIONS SERVICE**



*Providing emergency  
communications  
in time of need.*

## Auxiliary Communications Service Capabilities

After the magnitude 5.4 Chino Hills Earthquake on July 29, 2008, many people in Southern California found that they were unable to complete cellular and wire-line phone calls. The system was not damaged, simply overwhelmed by the large number of attempted calls. With their portable, mobile and base radios, amateur radio operators were able to immediately listen for reports of damage or requests for assistance. Fortunately there was only minor damage and the telephone system recovered quickly.

Had there been more damage or a larger disruption of the communications system a radio roll call of the amateur radio operators would have been conducted, just as is practiced every week. This would find out the amount of damage and who is available to respond to Emergency Operations Centers, Communications Support Vehicles, and field locations. On activation by the Chief Radio Officer or an Emergency Manager, amateurs would operate both amateur radio and public safety communications equipment.

Efforts are under way for emergency monitoring of amateur radio, General Mobile Radio Service (GMRS) and Family Radio Service (FRS) channels. The widely available FRS radios can provide neighborhood communications and relay messages to GMRS users who can forward the messages to their destination. Amateur radio operators in the community can also provide another FRS/GMRS contact point, neighborhood level damage reports and requests for assistance.

Any licensed amateur radio operator is eligible to join the Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES) to help provide this vital link between the community and emergency agencies.

## Digital Technology

Advanced technology is being utilized with narrow band digital radios that allow twice the number of channels for voice and low speed short message data. High speed digital data radios that are transparent to computer networks are being used to provide additional capacity for sending reports, photos and video on amateur radio frequencies. Conventional high frequency radio equipment is used for sending radio messages to regional, state and national destinations.

## Qualifications

To join the ACS, you need to have an amateur radio license or be willing to study and take the test to obtain one. Licensed GMRS radio operators and people with computer/network skills are also needed. The minimum age is 21 years old. Monthly training and weekly radio nets provide the knowledge and experience to function in an emergency. The San Bernardino County Fire Department processes applicants and requires completion of Incident Command System (ICS) classes, submission of live scan fingerprints, and completion of an orientation class. The ICS classes from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (F.E.M.A) are available online. Additional County training can be completed to respond on county fire incidents and provide mutual aid to other counties in the state.

ACS provides communication support to Montclair, Rancho Cucamonga, Upland and the County of San Bernardino. The unit is affiliated with the San Bernardino County Emergency Communication Service and reports to the San Bernardino County Operational Area of the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES).



This brush engine is attacking a wildland fire like the Grand Prix fire that swept the foothills of Rancho Cucamonga in late 2003. Some homes were destroyed, but firefighters kept losses to a minimum. Auxiliary Communications Service members provided communications support during the fire and damage assessment patrols as the fire passed.

Join the Auxiliary Communications Service and become “part of the solution, instead of part of the problem.” ACS training prepares members to be useful to the community in a disaster situation — knowing where to go and what to do, as part of the emergency response team.

For further information about joining the Auxiliary Communications Service contact:

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