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Ham Radio Operators Put to the Test

By Sophie Braccini



Canyon's Emergency Operation Center (Jonathan Goodwin in red) Photo Sophie Braccini

"Imagine a big fire raging in our highly fire sensitive areas, for each one of us the first concern will be to know which evacuation routes we can take," says Marty Heyman, a volunteer emergency coordinator for Orinda. The evacuation routes do not stop at the border of each city, so on February 21 emergency volunteers from Canyon, Lafayette, Montclair, Moraga and Orinda joined with the local fire departments to conduct a test of their ability to communicate in an emergency. Amateur, or 'ham,' radio operators are key to the success of such communication, because traditional land lines and cell phones might be inoperative.

The test sites were the Emergency Operation Centers (EOC) in each of the five areas. Participating vehicles, equipped with radios, patrolled freeways and main arteries from Mountain Blvd. in Montclair, to Walnut Creek, Claremont and all the main sites in between.

"The test was very successful," said Jonathan Goodwin from the Canyon EOC, "with all our hills there are some sites that cannot reach other specific points, but through relays and/or amplification we can get through to each other."

An Orinda neighborhood equipped with Family Radio Service (FRS --an improved walkie talkie radio system) was included in the test. "It is critical that neighborhoods get equipped and become capable to communicate with the emergency amateur radio network," says Heyman, "when major disaster happen, it has been observed that 90% of the time neighbors are rescued by neighbors, they need to have the tools to communicate their situation and emergencies when the normal communication network fail."

The group encourages residents to get trained as amateur radio operators and/or join CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) and get a FRS system. For more information contact CERT, www.lamorindacert.org

Amateur Radio Training
Free six week course
Begins May 6th 7-9pm
Mt. Diablo Amateur Radio Club
The Salvation Army-Concord
Contact: John Primus, KI6OUY
primus@astound.net
(925)825-7670

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