



## **FORSYTH COUNTY AUXCOMM**

# **WHAT IS A COMMUNICATIONS EMERGENCY**

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First what constitute our community communications systems? Land line and cellular telephone, internet, and public safety radio and data systems. However we lose power these systems stop working and the police, fire, and hospital services become quickly overwhelmed. This is when amateur radio operators are there to take up the slack as emergency communication volunteers. Throughout the history of amateur radio, hams have always stepped up. Recent history clearly demonstrates this commitment regardless of the event ... Hurricanes, fires, ice storms, earthquakes, floods and so on.

### **New York City World Trade Center attack**

The September 11 attack in 2001 resulted in traditional telecommunications being stretched and overloaded. Phone networks, both land line and cellular throughout the North East were congested into uselessness. As a result, amateur radio played a large role in facilitating communications between the various emergency departments, which operated on different frequencies and protocols.

### **Joplin, Missouri 2011 tornado**

When an EF5 multiple-vortex tornado hit Joplin, Missouri killing 161 people and injuring at least 990, it also in addition to decimating almost the entire town, it destroyed its communication infrastructure. Once again, amateur radio played an important role in restoring emergency service communications in the area and especially in providing communications links between the local and regional hospitals.

### **Hurricane Katrina**

New Orleans and other Gulf Coast communities bore the brunt of hurricane Katrina, a Category 5 hurricane. When it hit, entire emergency communications systems were completely destroyed, including power stations, generators, internet servers, mobile phone towers, and 911 services. Again, amateur radio was instrumental in the rescue and recovery process by maintaining effective communications when other modes of communication were damaged or overloaded.

### **Colorado Floods of 2013**

Portions of Colorado had over 20 inches of rain fall in just 5 days with many locations receiving an entire year's rain in less than a week. 19 Colorado counties were inundated with local disasters being declared. Amateur radio was there to answer the call and for several towns it became the only link to civilization and was instrumental in the evacuation of many communities within the affected area. And at one point amateur radio also became the dispatch communications for several fire departments.



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One of the primary missions of Forsyth County AuxComm is to provide communications during any emergency. So ... what is a communication emergency?

A communication emergency exists when critical communication system failure(s) put the public at risk. As demonstrated in the examples just given, day-to-day traditional communication systems can be adversely affected by a variety of circumstances that can quickly overload or cause critical damage to these systems. It's as simple as a storm that knocks down telephone lines or radio towers, flooding that severs a community from the outside world, an event that causes a massive increase in the use of a communication system thereby causing it to become overloaded, or the failure of a key component in a system that has widespread consequences.

Other examples are easily found. While violent storms and earthquakes can damage and destroy communication facilities; these same critical facilities can also be damaged in "normal" circumstances. Underground cables get dug up, fires occur in telephone equipment buildings, a car crash knocks down a key telephone pole or any number of everyday occurrences can and do affect our communications. Hospital or 911 telephone systems can also fail; not too long ago the entire Washington State 911 system went down for 6 hours due to a computer glitch.

Even when any of the events mentioned occurring, a large-scale emergency such as a chemical or nuclear accident can result in much more message traffic than the system was designed to handle. Some emergency operations occur in areas without any existing communication systems, such as with backcountry searches or wildfires.

The reality is that there are endless possibilities for our communications systems to fail and it is important to recognize that we as amateur radio operators are a valuable resource to the communities we live in. We possess the skills as emergency communicators, the equipment and the frequency spectrum to meet the needs of such communication emergencies.

Forsyth County AuxComm strives to have a robust communication network capable of filling any communication gap whether it is small or large. As Amateur Radio Operators, you have skills and equipment unavailable to most citizens. These special capabilities, along with the level of training we participate in enable us to assist our communities during times of emergency.

Forsyth County AuxComm provides communications support to both Governmental and Non-Governmental agencies.

We serve:

- Forsyth County Office of Emergency Management
- Forsyth County Emergency Operations Center (EOC)
- Forsyth County Sheriff's Department
- Forsyth County Fire Department
- Forsyth County EMS
- Winston – Salem Police Department



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- Winston – Salem Fire Department
- Several Surrounding Jurisdictions through Mutual Aid Agreements
- American Red Cross
- Duke Power Company, Joint Information Center (JIC), Weather Center and Damage Dispatch
- Forsyth County Area Hospitals
- Salvation Army, NC Divisional Headquarters and Regional Center
- Local and State Incident Management Teams (IMT)
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

North Carolina Office of Emergency Management as well as local OEM's require that we complete and maintain currency in the basic 4 FEMA ICS courses to prepare you to understand and fit into their organizational structure. These courses are IS100, IS 200, IS 700 and IS 800 and are amiable on-line courses and take about 2 ½ to 3 hours each with a certificate awarded after each class has been completed. In addition, Forsyth County AuxComm requires all personnel to complete the Basic E-Comm 101 course. To be a Net Controller within an EOC or Command Post or qualify to be a Communications Team Lead, you are required to complete the 8-hour Forsyth County EOC-NCS course. Additionally to qualify as a Communications Team Leader, you must complete Forsyth County's 4 hour WebEOC classroom course.

To get more info on these courses please e-mail any Forsyth County AuxComm staff member, email [AuxComm@w4nc.com](mailto:AuxComm@w4nc.com) or visit the W4NC.com website and review the AuxComm tabs.

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