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SATURDAY | 4.26.14

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Volunteers utilize radio skills

Ham radio operators help in emergencies

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ST. GEORGE — In the wake of an emergency where regular communication fails, 40 amateur radio operators with the Washington County Amateur Radio Emergency Service are ready to receive their orders to volunteer their time and equip-

ment to maintain an open communication network with ham radios.

The operators, also known as "hams," work closely with the Washington County Emergency Services to open communications at its emergency operation center as well as other locations throughout Southern Utah.

Norman Smith, WCARES

public information officer, said the group consists of hams varying in ages and skill levels.

"All hams have the skills to provide this communication should there be a time of disaster," Smith said. "The amateur radio operators that are in the Washington County ARES group

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Ham radio operator Norman Smith talks with another operator on the radio set in his home office Thursday. JUD BURKETT/THE SPECTRUM & DAILY NEWS

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monitor certain frequencies in the ham band. We monitor these frequencies for any kind of disaster or whatever may happen."

Hams can be "activated" by the Washington County Emergency Operation Center or the emergency services director, Pete Kuhlmann. If activated, hams will be notified by WCARES leaders on where to station themselves to open lines of communications.

"They can be used in anything from floods to fires to what's going on out in the field when we need an extra set of eyes," Kuhlmann said.

Kuhlmann said the WCARES group is a "great support" that provides assistance in "helping us upgrade our amateur radio capabilities and donate time to improve facilities."

"They participate with

MORE INFORMATION

For more information about the Washington County Amateur Radio Emergency Services, visit Ares-wc.org.

us in most of our exercises," Kuhlmann said. "They are active and do a really good job. Ham radio communications are the last available resource that survives most disasters, and when all other communications fail, usually the ARES group helps us talk to other areas. We communicate from here (at the emergency operation center) to the five-county regional area hospitals and other emergency operations centers, including the state."

Recently, the ARES group participated in the annual Great Utah Shake-Out with members of the St. George Police Department, Southwest Utah Public Health Department, Dixie Regional Medical Center and the religious Interfaith Council.

"One of the main justifications for us is the fact that communications can be easily overloaded, and in an earthquake, communications will fail," Smith said. "If 30 percent of people who own cell phones use their phone at the same time, it's likely communications will go down (as well)."

The WCARES hams also have volunteered during large sporting events, including the Zion 100 and the St. George Ironman 70.3 U.S. Pro Championships.

"That's real action for us," Smith said. "We're located along the course and communicate from one station to the other should there be an accident or somebody is injured."

Smith said ham operators can learn more about the WCARES by visiting ARES-WC.org. People interested in learning more about amateur radio can visit the WCARES website or DixieHam.org.

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