

**The Loma Prieta Earthquake
October 17, 1998**

A Retrospective View

These observations are being written nearly fifteen years after this event. This is an attempt to organize the various reports, recommendations and observations into some coherent form for use by current disaster planning personnel. I feel that everything discussed here is as pertinent today as it was in the months following this disaster. The events of September 11, 2001 reinforce my opinion.

I doubt that such in-depth studies have been made before or since, regarding amateur radio response in a disaster situation. It is still disappointing and frustrating to me that responsible agencies have not acknowledged, or reacted, to the problems and situations, which we identified and described in the months following this event.

Included in this volume are numerous reports and articles written about the event. The most significant item included herein, is a study conducted at the University of California Santa Cruz (UCSC). A doctoral candidate in the Department of Sociology at the university conducted this study. The many observations and recommendations included in her report are totally relevant to disaster planning and homeland security issues today.

Proposed Report to ARRL

Following the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, we wanted to better understand the reactions of the local radio amateurs. A very small percentage of licensed amateurs in Santa Cruz County had provided support to emergency communications operations. This included some of the personnel previously involved in ARES activities. A later review of Call Book entries indicated there were over 1,000 licensed amateurs in Santa Cruz County at the time. We felt that understanding this experience was critical to better preparing for future disasters. We sought the aid of the University of California at Santa Cruz in making a professional and objective study.

The completed study identified numerous reactions, which were pervasive in the local amateur community. There was no reason to believe that these attitudes were limited to our local populace, or that they have changed significantly over the years. I believed that our experience and the findings of the University researcher should be shared with the ARRL. I proposed writing a summary report based upon the UCSC study, to be published in QST.

Several exchanges of correspondence occurred over a two-month period following my initial proposal to the League on May 22, 1990.

I must assume that the League felt the findings were too controversial to be shared with their membership. I was never told that this was the case. In fact, I was never told anything. My detailed proposal of June 22, 1990 to the Field Services Manager was never acknowledged.

ARRL has negotiated spectrum issues and successfully fought for protection of amateur radio "rights" over the years. The primary argument has ALWAYS been to emphasize the role of amateur radio communications in civil disaster situations. This argument has been quite persuasive.

Following the events of September 11, 2001, the League again was actively selling the merits of amateur radio emergency capabilities. As usual, the argument infers that what is being claimed applies to most, if not all, licensed amateurs. Our experience in 1989 belies that claim. This was a homeland security issue then, and it is now.

Currently, the ARRL is using this same argument in combating proposals for the authorization of Broadband over Power Lines (BPL). Can these claims of the vital emergency role of ham radio be effectively proven? In my opinion this is a highly vulnerable position.

This is not a condemnation of Hams. In fact, civic consciousness of amateurs is probably not much different than that of the general public--a conclusion supported by the UCSC study.

Wayne Thalls, KB6KN
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