

1954 Graham Hill Road
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

May 22, 1990

Paul L. Rinaldo, Editor
American Radio Relay League
225 Main Street
Newington, CT 06111

Dear Paul,

In the March issue of QST, excerpts from a manuscript I submitted were included in the article entitled Earthquake! In the article I described the experiences of amateurs here in Santa Cruz County, where the earthquake was centered. I feel that our experiences can benefit other emergency groups in their planning efforts.

During the operation I acted as the Emergency Coordinator during the eight days following the event. Twenty-four hours after we terminated operations, I called the first of several debriefing sessions. One of the things which bothered me most was the fact that with a county-wide ham population of 500 plus, we were forced to rely primarily upon volunteers from other areas. If other northern California counties had experienced the devastation we faced, we could not possibly have coped with the communications requirements. Every resident of our county was a victim in this massive disaster. In order to better understand what motivated some hams to volunteer, while most did not, I arranged for a study by the Sociology Department of the University of California at Santa Cruz. That study has just been concluded.

I had reluctantly reached the conclusion that radio amateurs were no more civic-minded than other citizens. This professional study by an outsider reaches the same conclusion. The findings of the researcher would probably apply to most volunteer groups. There was no correlation between willingness to volunteer and personal losses suffered. Interviewed for the study were local volunteers, local non-volunteers, and outsiders. The study reinforces the belief that a core group of dedicated emergency communicators (ARES) is essential to adequate preparedness. One of the more disturbing attitudes uncovered by the study was the outright opposition of a significant number of amateurs to ham public-service activities of any kind. The fact that we had experienced the most costly natural disaster in U.S. history has not altered this view---these people still oppose such activity. Some are even highly critical of those who devoted long hours to quake duties. I doubt this is an isolated local viewpoint.

Are you interested in publishing an article on this study and the actions we are taking as a result of the findings? If so, I will proceed with preparation of the piece. I can not guarantee that the article will not generate some controversy. I happen to think that would be healthy.

Very truly yours,

Wayne Thalls, KB6KN

June 18, 1990

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Wayne Thralls, KB6KN
1954 Graham Hill Rd.
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Dear Wayne:

The QST Editorial Committee has referred your May 22 letter to Field Services staff for reply. We would be pleased to review the University of California report to determine whether a summary article would be suitable for QST and/or other League periodicals.

Thank you for the opportunity to consider your proposal and for your interest in the programs of the ARRL Field Organization.

73.

Sincerely yours,



Richard Palm, K1CE
Field Services Manager

RP:cnh

Wayne Thallm, KB6KN
1954 Graham Hill Road
Santa Cruz, CA 95060
408/438-1235

June 22, 1990

Richard Palm, N1CE
Field Services Manager
American Radio Relay League
225 Main Street
Newington, CT 08111

Dear Richard:

Thank you for your letter of June 18.

The October 17, 1989 temblor, the third largest earthquake to hit the continental U.S. in this century, was centered in our county. This was the most costly natural disaster ever to occur in this country (in excess of \$7 billions). It obviously was also the most costly national disaster to involve hams since the beginning of the hobby. Locally, 60% of downtown Santa Cruz retail and office space has been destroyed. The economy is severely impacted. Amateur radio played such a strategic role in relief operations that I believe other groups should benefit from our experience.

Rather than provide you with a copy of the 70 page UCSC report, at this time, I think it more appropriate to provide you with some background and a summary of the study. The University of California study, which was made at our behest, must be viewed in proper context when applying the findings to future amateur radio preparedness. My perspective is as the Emergency Coordinator during most of the operation. This report does not reach final conclusions nor make specific recommendations. It is meant to be a tool for us in planning ongoing efforts. It is the story of this need and the actions we have taken locally that I propose to relate in an article. The organization and advance preparation of the local ARES group is also noteworthy. This was certainly a major factor in our ability to respond to the needs presented by this disaster. There are no local rivalries or jurisdictional disagreements to diminish our effectiveness. Unlike many communities the local amateur group is an integral part of local disaster planning and organization. The ARES/RACES unit is officially a part of the County Office of Emergency Services. Interviews with officials of that department, and of the Red Cross, will be included in the article.

One of the mistakes some of us had made in our planning prior to the October 17, 1989 earthquake, was to make the assumption that in a serious disaster situation everyone who could would be there to help. Our local experience proved otherwise. How many others are basing their emergency plans upon similar beliefs? Everyone one in the county was immediately impacted by the event, including those hams who did not suffer property losses. This direct involvement certainly shaped the thinking and reaction of the several hundred amateurs who reside in this county.

During the eight days of amateur radio operations, we used approximately 400 volunteers. Most came from out of the area. Some from as far away as southern California, Oregon, and Nevada. Most were our neighbors from adjacent Monterey and Santa Clara Counties. If those counties had suffered significant damage, I am not certain what we would have done?

Of the locals who did volunteer some were forced to work extremely long hours and very stressful multiple shifts, during the first few days following the disaster. Most of those who volunteered at any time had ARES ties or other emergency related background. One of the other major problems we faced was the absence of an adequate number of managers (AECs) for ARES/RACES operations. This was also a problem, in varying degrees, in other counties. While it is feasible to use outsiders in many jobs---operational management is not one of those areas. This is especially true in a situation where most of the workers are strangers to the area. Addressing this issue is our top priority.

Twenty-four hours after the cessation of amateur radio operations, the first of a series of debriefings was held. A half dozen individuals, who had played key roles in the operations, were asked to participate. One of the first decisions made at that time was to attempt to learn more about the volunteer response, so that we might be better prepared for the next event. We arranged with the Sociology Department at UCSC to perform an objective professional study of individual actions and attitudes. The Santa Cruz County Amateur Radio Club has underwritten the expenses associated with the study. This is, I think, a very responsible action for any ham club to take. That, in itself, is newsworthy.

At the outset we agreed that the study would be based on interviews. The study would include ARES members, other club members, and outside hams. We also agreed that all interviews would be strictly confidential, and that no reference would be made to individuals by name, in the final report. Furthermore it was agreed that all interview notes and recordings would remain in the possession of the researcher, and that they would not be made available to anyone else.

Because a significant number of amateurs refused to participate in the study, this fact was considered relevant and is included. Refusals included those who did not respond to repeated messages on their answering machines. Some declined to participate, directly.

HOW CAN WE CONVINCE AMATEURS THAT THERE ARE SOME RESPONSIBILITIES ASSOCIATED WITH THEIR RIGHT TO USE THE AIRWAVES?

This study points out one factor which appears to have considerable weight in determining whether hams offer their services. This is their philosophy concerning the role ham radio plays in their lives. There is a decided split between those who view it as purely an entertaining hobby and those who consider it a hobby with a "built-in-commitment" to public service and emergency efforts. Most have attitudes which lie somewhere between these extremes. These views on volunteerism are probably little different than among the populace at large.

Additional studies are underway at the University on the role of volunteers in disaster situations. Ms. Dull, author of our study, is participating in one such study to be included in a forthcoming book. In addition she plans to use the amateur radio study in further publication in professional journals.

Sincerely,

Wayne Thalls, KB6KN