

Amateur Radio and CERT - Bridging the Communications Gap

➤ What is Amateur Radio?

Amateur Radio, commonly called "ham radio", is a hobby enjoyed by many people throughout the world. As of 2004, there were about 3 million licensed Amateur Radio operators worldwide, with about 700,000 of those in the USA. In the US, the Federal Communications Commission regulates Amateur Radio, and after successful completion of an Amateur Radio license examination, issues a license to operate.

➤ Emergency Communications

In times of crisis and natural disasters, ham radio is often the only surviving means of communications. It has been found all too often that both wire and cellular telephone systems fail or are overloaded in times of crises and radios dedicated to emergency services fare little better. It is at this point, when Amateur radio can provide vital communications until other services can be restored.

In Sarasota County, members of the Sarasota County Auxiliary Communications Service, Inc., (ACS) volunteer their time, skills, and equipment to provide emergency communications services for Sarasota County Emergency Management. Amateur Radio operators also provide support and assistance to other agencies and organizations that may have a communications need.

➤ Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)

During the initial hours following the disaster, emergency personnel are overloaded, unable to reach areas or are short of personnel to respond. Others often have had to pitch in to help persons in their immediate neighborhood. Sarasota County Emergency Management Division's CERT program was developed to support our community in this effort. CERT has increased the overall level of public disaster readiness in Sarasota County, provided emergency skills that people may use in day-to-day emergencies, enhanced the bond between government and populace, and increased community spirit.

➤ Amateur Radio and CERT

Amateur Radio can play a vital role in CERT communications when other systems are unavailable. CERT members, who are licensed Amateur Radio operators, can be used to bridge the gap between CERT teams and vital services, such as Police, Fire, or Medical assistance. They can also provide valuable "on scene" damage assessment reports via Amateur Radio when no other means of communication is available.

➤ Amateur Radio Training and Examinations

ACS provides Amateur Radio study material individuals interested in becoming Amateur Radio operators. ACS also provides FCC examination opportunities upon completion of those studies. ACS provides this service for CERT members interested in becoming Amateur Radio operators, in order to provide an additional tool for their CERT teams.

➤ Other Opportunities to Assist

When not deployed on CERT activities, CERT Team Amateur Radio operators can become part of the ACS program, where they will be able to assist with other communications needs, such as at evacuation shelters or other locations that may need communications.

➤ More Information

Sarasota County Auxiliary Communications Service - <http://www.saracs.org>
For Amateur Radio study and testing information, contact Ron Wetjen - wd4ahz@saracs.org