

## HATS OFF !!!

Amateur Radio operators have proven over and over that older technology can be the most reliable technology. During and after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, hams running on generators, and sometimes with makeshift antennas, worked throughout the hurricane zone night and day putting emergency stations on the air. They guided rescuers to stranded victims and updated weather services via the West Gulf Ares Emergency Net and the Hurricane Watch Net.

Amateur radio was the primary means of contact with the outside world for many shelters. It's estimated that some 1000 amateur radio volunteers helped serve the hurricane-ravaged communities and shelters, even providing communications for various Federal, State and Local Governments.

Still, the real lesson of the Amateur Radio successes isn't that old sometimes is better than new; upgraded, reliable hardware is vital for adequate emergency response. Amateur radio operators have continued to upgrade their technological abilities in areas such as satellites, digital systems, cross-band repeaters, and more. As the American Radio Relay League (ARRL) puts it, the Morse code key may still be on the desk, but generally it's next to a modern system operable under extreme emergency conditions.

Katrina taught two key lessons. First, the Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES) organization proved effective because amateur radio operators do not depend on a centralized infrastructure. When cell towers, phone switching centers, or other central communications networks are down, Amateurs are not. Many operators have their own generators and are ready to fire them up to get on the air when there's no power. National, State, County and Local disaster response plans must assume that the centralized communications infrastructure likely will be crippled, so the emergency system must include a distributed or "mesh" networking scheme.

Second, Amateur Radio succeeded because operators subscribe to a mission that comes with their licenses, which is to be ready to provide emergency communications whenever and wherever they are needed. ARES has a well-conceived action plan coordinated through the Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES). **ARES is part of the ARRL, and RACES is coordinated through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).** Amateur Radio operators can work independently to serve their community as circumstances require.

A decentralized emergency plan requires committed people who truly understand and care about their responsibilities. The best emergency response relies on distributed manpower. **My hats off to all of you who care about the quality of our emergency**

# communications system.

Tom Harris, k5wth