

Can we learn from the Paradise and Maui Fires?

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In the Maui fires it is reported that people didn't receive emergency alerts because officials failed to activate sirens that would have warned the population of the approaching flames. How about Ham radio? Was it used to alert residents of the approaching fire? Was there a Plan for Hams and selected NON Ham operators to make use of Ham radio for alerting? Were Emergency nets practiced regularly with drill scenarios?



According to the ARRL,

“Wildfires have affected phones, internet, and cell services across Maui. **VERY** Limited Cell contact was established with Lahaina or its ham operators due to burned fiber lines and **VERY limited hams in the area**, ... Hawaii has many amateur radio repeaters...” (bolding emphasis added).

Thus, it appears that Ham radio equipment was available (i.e., there were “many amateur radio repeaters”); however, there were “**VERY limited hams in the area**” (emphasis in original).

One Ham who lost his home in the fire storm advised:

There was no one to talk to on the radio. There weren't enough Hams. Everybody was just “getting out”. He advised that one Ham transmitted on Simplex, but no one responded, and he was not able to transmit into a local repeater because his radio was not programmed for it.

Several follow up questions have been sent to a local Ham operator who lost his home in the fire. I am not sure if a response will be received, but here are a couple of those questions.

“Was there any established Ham radio frequency plan that allowed information that Hams may have possessed to be transmitted into the general community by radio (i.e., where people could listen to a specific Ham frequency that was designated in advance)?”

“Was there an established plan for NON Hams to be able to transmit on the Ham frequencies (being monitored 24/7) in order to save life, etc... .”

As of this writing no information has been provided indicating that either of the above plans were in existence and/or practiced. This information would be helpful so that the Shingletown Emergency Radio Core Areas Plan (SERCAP) can be improved.

In the Maui fires, I was advised that for people in Hotels and Inns, and in response to the lack of ability to call 911, Ham Radios were provided to NON Ham workers in the hotels so that they could be used for assistance in making 911 relay calls (e.g., to make an emergency call for a person having a heart attack). This Non Ham use was apparently not part of any established pre-existing plan.

How do these disasters relate to Shingletown?

In Maui, they had radios and repeaters, but not enough Hams. We likewise have repeaters and radios in Shingletown, but NOT enough Hams.

So what will Shingletown residents do if there is a wildfire in Shingletown, and cell phones and landlines are not working etc.... AND Hams are not available to send out emergency life saving information? Or, what if a Ham needs assistance and there are no other Hams to help with such matters?

Now for those who can't make up their minds on whether a non Ham can ever use a Ham frequency, let's cut through it. Fire is coming. Winds are variable between 25 and 50 miles per hour. Your family is down wind and in the bulls eye. Would you want them to receive a warning from a NON Ham transmitted on a specific Ham frequency that your family monitors? The answer is either "YES" or "No". If you answer anything but "YES", then stop reading now and go away.

In Shingletown it has taken years of work to develop an emergency radio system for emergency preparedness, including wildfire alerting. The Shingletown Emergency Radio Core Areas Plan (SERCAP) system continues with the "built in" ability of NON Hams to transmit (in an emergency essential communication needs in connection with the immediate safety of human life... See Note 1 below) on specific Ham frequencies. All are encouraged to monitor such frequencies on a 24/7 hour basis. Thus, the potential for immediate life saving communication ability is EXISTING AND ON CALL as part of the "neighborhood" radio plan. In Shingletown, this part of the plan was previously wide spread throughout the entire Plan system.

However, changes were necessary (e.g., limiting transmit ability to selected stations who are following the SERCAP procedures), in an effort to mitigate abuse and malicious radio interference. At this time, the Plan's focus continues to be limited to the 4 participating Areas which follow the Plan. But, even with these changes, the plan still provides potential benefit to other Areas / Neighborhoods that set up their own non-interfering plan(s).

Again, in Maui, it appears that Ham repeaters / radios went unused due to lack of Hams. In Shingletown we also have a lack of Hams. One doesn't have to be a rocket scientist to hear the ticking time bomb.

The revised Plan now limits transmit ability to only specific station operators (i.e., specific Hams and specific Non Hams who follow SERCAP procedures and FCC regulations).

Notwithstanding such restrictions, the Plan has endeavored to maintain potential life saving "built in" resources for the Plan. This provides the potential for more immediate emergency communications capability to save life when minutes count. The benefit is that ALL persons can listen to the plan frequencies (IF SERCAP is activated). We need to remember that all of this is

volunteer. So, if people don't help out, then the plan fails.

To listen, you merely have to program the specified frequencies with no tones, no offset and no transmit. You can listen and use such information (IF volunteers activate) in addition to your own Neighborhood Emergency Radio Plan. However, each Area / Neighborhood is responsible for its own emergency communications plan and preparations as SERCAP is focused on the 4 participating Areas / Neighborhoods which are following the SERCAP procedures.

Go to <http://www.shastadefense.com/ShastaEmergencyRadio.htm> and related pages for details. Such website is the only authorized source for SERCAP.

NOTE 1:

IMMEDIATE THREAT TO LIFE. IMMEDIATE SAFETY OF HUMAN LIFE.

FCC: "§ 97.403 Safety of life and protection of property.

No provision of these rules prevents the use by an amateur station of any means of radio communication at its disposal to provide essential communication needs in connection with the immediate safety of human life and immediate protection of property when normal communication systems are not available."

CALIFORNIA EVACUATION ORDER:

"Evacuation Order: Immediate threat to life. This is a lawful order to leave now. The area is lawfully closed to public access." See California Governor's Office of Emergency Services ([here](#))

Also see links here:

<http://www.shastadefense.com/SER-PolicyUseNonHamsEmergAndOesAlerts..htm>

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