



KARO/ECHO

Kensington Emergency Preparedness Committee

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karoecho.net

KARO/ECHO Organization

- ▶ KARO/ECHO organizes emergency communications locally if other forms of communication are inoperable.
- ▶ KARO/ECHO: Kensington Amateur Radio Operators/ El Cerrito HAM Operators
 - ▶ Historically separate but joined for at least 25 years
- ▶ HAM radio emergency communications with a historical focus on Kensington and El Cerrito but now has participants from Emeryville to El Sobrante.
- ▶ Organized to respond to any situation where normal communication, mainly the phone system becomes inoperable.
 - ▶ Most likely situation would be an earthquake.
 - ▶ In the event of a wildfire, we would evacuate and the phone system would operate before the fire passes through.
 - ▶ We would activate to assist in the aftermath and for any other situation where the phones are out.
 - ▶ Also assist with receiving information from disasters in other areas.

Ham Radio Operations Capability

- ▶ We should be operating in support of CERT organization but in the absence of CERT structure we improvise.
- ▶ Three types of radios in use: FRS or walk-talkies, GMRS and HAM.
 - ▶ FRS are inexpensive, no license required, few channels, low power
 - ▶ GMRS, bit more expensive, \$35 10 year license per household for 10 years, more powerful
 - ▶ HAM, bit more expensive yet, many more frequencies, several types of radios, much more power possible, test of radio theory and operation required for license, individual FCC call sign, \$35 10 year license for holder only
- ▶ To maintain skills and equipment ready for operation we check-in to the Club frequency weekly and hold a simulated emergency exercise twice a year.
- ▶ Organized to communicate at several levels:
 - ▶ Resource and information exchanges within neighborhoods and between neighborhoods
 - ▶ Communication of dangerous situations to the EOC
 - ▶ Welfare information about the whereabouts and condition of people to their loved ones outside the disaster area.
 - ▶ We do recognize the fact that we will not have help from our first responders for quite a while.

Operational Plan

- ▶ If a disaster strikes, HAM operators will secure their home and neighborhood situations then sign on to the “net” which is on KARO/ECHO’s primary frequency of 146.415.
- ▶ One operator will assume the role of “net control” to direct traffic. Operators will request passage of traffic to other operators and Net control will pair them up on a different frequency to pass the message then both return to net control to be ready for further messages.
- ▶ The messages will be coming from neighborhoods around the location of the operator, transmitted on FRS or GMRS radios.
- ▶ Content of messages might either request or offer resources like equipment, supplies or people to help, emergency situations like fires, gas leaks, etc., or welfare messages about people.
- ▶ We would also have the ability to communicate information outside of the blackout area.
- ▶ We are trying to recruit licensed HAM operators, or convince people to become licensed, to become familiar with our system so they could participate in an emergency. We lack coverage in some areas and we need more than one HAM per area to take shifts and to replace anyone who is not available.

Missing link is ability to communicate info to first responders in emergency

- ▶ The missing link is our ability to communicate emergency information to our first responders.
- ▶ KARO/ECHO has an antenna on the El Cerrito City Hall and a radio and connection to the antenna inside City Hall.
- ▶ In the past we were told that we would walk messages down the hall to first responders with the activated EOC in the council chamber.
- ▶ Our current information questions whether there will be an EOC (Emergency Operations Center) activated for us to report to.
- ▶ We believe that there is still an antenna on the Kensington Public Safety Building/Fire House and a patch box outside to connect to the antenna.
- ▶ We are hoping to have a radio inside again when the building is completed.
- ▶ We have been trying to complete a Memorandum of Understanding with the Fire Department to agree on how KARO/ECHO would operate in an emergency and how we would communicate with the Fire Dept. but we have not received a signed agreement or suggestions for changes.