



Section Manager

House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Preparedness February 28, 2017 Testimony Summary

Topic: Disaster Emergency Communications

Committee Briefer: John Core, Oregon Section Manager, American Radio Relay League

Contact Information: Email KX7YT@arrl.org Address: 9831 NW Silver Ridge Loop, Portland, OR 97229 (503) 706-4779 (Cell)

Major Points of Testimony:

1. Major Points: Auxiliary Amateur Radio can be critical in a major disaster when all normal means of communications fail. In FEMA Region X's Cascadia Rising After Action Report (AAR), they concluded that Amateur Radio was "a critical mechanism for backup communications" (Operational Communications, Page 10). The Oregon Office of Emergency Management's (OEM) AAR (p. 14) concluded that "Where available, the statewide amateur radio network was utilized very successfully by many local/tribal jurisdictions and the State ECC as alternative modes of communications".

As a voluntary, unfunded organization of the Field Division of the American Radio Relay League, the Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES) recruits, trains and provides radio operators to local and County emergency management agencies as well as OEM and hospitals, statewide.

2. Secondary Points: Maintaining and strengthening Amateur Radio programs in Oregon is an essential element of emergency preparedness. New ways to engage the 18,000 FCC licensed Amateurs in Oregon are needed to bring more into public service. The growing demand for trained operators far outstrips our ability to serve the need. The current capacity of the volunteer force, especially under disaster conditions, would be severely tested.

We primarily use a radio system established in 2008 under a \$250,000 allocation in funding provided to OEM to equip all County EOCs with the digital radio system that we use today. OEM purchased the equipment and ARES volunteers installed it and then trained the operators who maintained the system. This funding revolutionized Amateur Radio emergency communications in Oregon. There is no current plan to replace or update the equipment which is now growing old (in terms of radio technology). A plan for the future of the system, known as the Oregon ARES Digital Network is needed. In addition, Amateur Radio volunteers fund and maintain an extensive network of radio repeaters used by mobile radio operators. Again, these repeaters play an important emergency communications role in public service activities.

3. Tertiary Points: A strong Amateur Radio auxiliary radio service in Oregon needs more volunteers, more training capacity and a stronger partnership between all of those involved be they local, County State government or Federal agencies, non-governmental groups (e.g. Red Cross) and private entities (utilities and most hospitals). We need to plan for the future of this important service.

Finally, Amateur Radio operators need to be able to use their mobile radios from their vehicles. House Bill 2597 and Senate Bill 2 (Distracted Driving) would eliminate the current exemption for FCC licensed Amateur. My testimony to the House Judiciary Committee of February 27th on this matter is attached for your consideration.