



The Radio Amateurs' Emergency Network

North Wilts RAYNET - 07/WL/132

National History

The Radio Amateurs' Emergency Network (RAYNET) is a national body of radio amateurs who are pledged to provide communications in times of emergency and disaster.

RAYNET was formed following the East Coast Floods Disaster in 1953, when radio amateurs provided emergency communication. Under the terms of the amateur radio licence, amateurs are not usually permitted to pass messages for third parties, but an agreement was reached which authorised this procedure while working for a User Service'. The list of User Services' has been increased and now includes the British Red Cross Society, the St. John Ambulance Brigade, the St. Andrew's Ambulance Association, Chief Emergency Planning Officer, or any UK police force, fire or ambulance service, health authority, government department or public utility.

RAYNET members come from all occupations and usually have an agreement with their employer that they will be released for duty if required in much the same way as volunteer fire fighters and Lifeboat crew members. Currently there are about three thousand members of the Network' throughout the county, and these are organized in groups of, on average, twenty five members. These groups have either politically or geographically defined areas and are under the leadership of a controller. In Counties or Regions where there is more than one group, there is normally a County or Regional Controller who co-ordinates the efforts of the various groups in his area. Zonal Co-ordinators look after an area based on the national Civil Defence Zones. All members carry laminated photographic identity cards which are issued centrally by the Radio Amateurs' Emergency Network. As training is an important aspect of RAYNET membership, the previous system of local teachings at group level has recently been enhanced by the appointment of a national Training Team Leader who heads a group with devising a scheme to enable training to be completed as a local level to an agreed national standard.

It is, of course, important to have hands on' experience and throughout the year RAYNET volunteers give freely of their time and use their own equipment to provide communications at local fun runs, marathons, car rallies, yacht races and similar events when message passing and engineering skills can be tried and tested. Voice transmissions are the norm, but typed messages in the forms of

- teletype' or packet' transmissions, are being increasingly used, the latter allowing 100% error free messages to be passed over both long and short distances

RAYNET has provided communications at disasters such as Zeebrugge and Lockerbie, as well as at many local emergencies when storms, flooding, telephone equipment failures, search and rescue missions and oil spills have all necessitated additional emergency communications. Overseas work is also undertaken, with RAYNET providing disaster relief communications, usually for the Red Cross.

News of families in overseas areas hit by hurricanes, earthquakes and other disasters can be passed on quickly to relatives on this country.

Additional controlled staffing can easily be provided by RAYNET groups calling in members from adjacent groups and regions. At Lockerbie, for example, there was a minimum of eighty members on duty during each of the first ten days with one hundred and thirty on the busier ones. RAYNET group members came from as far away as Pitlochry and Leicester with individual members coming from even further a field.

In Wiltshire the local authorities maintain permanent stations for RAYNET use in their emergency headquarters.

All registered members of the Radio Amateurs' Emergency Network are covered for third party claims and against personal accident under policies held by the Network.

As with all emergency situations, it is better to work with known faces, and meetings between the user services and RAYNET are therefore helpful. RAYNET members are invited to attend disaster exercises either as players or as observers, so that all will know what is expected of them should the need arise for additional communications arise at short notice.