

After Event Summary:

2021 Simulated Emergency Exercise (SET), October 30, 2021 09:00 – 12:00 PDT

Prepared by: D. Steventon, ve7ept

Special thanks to my co-organizers: ve7pgb, ve7sst, ve7mk and all who assisted at the PREOCs and from their personal stations.

The Prince George Amateur Radio Club (PGARC), Bulkley Valley Amateur Radio Society (BVARs), Terrace Amateur Radio Club (TARC), and BC North Country Amateur Radio Club (BCNCARC) organized a regional exercise as part of the Radio Amateurs of Canada annual SET. This represents the organizations that maintain the Northern BC vhf repeater network.

The focus this year was testing of 1) availability of radio amateurs on the regional vhf repeater network; and 2) to exercise the Winlink radio email system in support of local and regional emergency response officials.

The basic scenario envisioned for the exercise was a forecast severe winter storm for from Terrace through Prince George to the Peace River region. Hypothetically, EMBC tasked the volunteer Emergency Radio Communications Service (Radio Amateurs) to set up communication links among communities across the affected area to and from the NW and NE PREOCs, and potentially to Victoria. Details of the event plan are appended. For this event, we focused on the technical radio system side, and not on the organizational side of interacting with emergency officials.

Activities and Recommendations:

Call-out: An advance call-out for volunteers was conducted using the separate organizations email lists.

- The maintenance of a central call-out database for both of the EMBC regions (one was started in 2018), would be useful. A push to have amateurs pre-register as EMBC volunteers and have them contact local emergency managers should be maintained.

VHF Repeater Voice Network: This is the back-bone of our response system, and is tested every Sunday morning. There is a large pool of stations available from a wide geographical area. For the exercise, more than 50 stations checked-in from across the network, a very good turn-out and strong indication of interest.

The large number of check-ins in a compressed time-period illustrates some 'traffic control' realities of a large event. As recommended from previous year exercise, for the first hour we separated the western end of the network (Houston, Gransile, Hazelton, Smithers, Telkwa, Terrace) from the remainder, with separate net controls. A strategically

located station was assigned to monitor both nets in case of need for connection (e.g., for Terrace PREOC to talk to Prince George PREOC). Check-ins and traffic in the west were relatively light, so at 10:00 the two nets were re-combined.

Winlink Radio Email

The Winlink system for radio email and data (such as EMBC forms) has become the main-stay of formal traffic in North America due to the robustness, efficiency, and flexibility of the network.

Both the Terrace PREOC (NW Provincial Regional Emergency Operations Centre) and Prince George NE PREOC stations were activated. VE7SST also acted as an email hub station from the Peace River area.

The Bulkley Valley Amateur Radio Society maintains an automated Hybrid Radio Message Server station (gateway) in Smithers (VE7RBH). It was used as a radio-only (internet disconnected) message drop-off and pick-up hub for the exercise, simulating an internet outage. The BVARs also activated its portable RMS station (VE7RHD) at a simulated municipal EOC.

Messages and documents were successfully exchanged among VE7NWZ (Terrace PREOC), VE7PGZ (Prince George PREOC), VE7SST (Peace River region), VE7RHD (Smithers EOC) and several individual stations in the north and lower mainland.

- There remains a need to familiarize more of our volunteers with the Winlink system.
- PREOC stations should consider some re-configuration to allow more automated use of radio email by PREOC officials, supervised by radio staff rather than radio operators acting as email clerks.