



MEDIA RELEASE

Emergency Management

99 Edison Blvd
Silver Bay, MN 55614
218-226-4444 office
218-220-7811 cell
Bj.kohlstedt@co.lake.mn.us

“Can You Hear Me Now?”

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Some of us remember when a fiber-optic line was cut in Duluth in 2010. Along the entire north shore, many people couldn't use their landline phones, cell phones, internet, or even credit cards. It was difficult to communicate with our friends, let alone to call 911.

One team of volunteer responders, who came to the rescue then, is still prepared to respond whenever communication failures happen. The Lake County Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Services (RACES) group meets monthly and trains regularly to keep sharp.

“Despite their title of “Amateurs,” our RACES team is not just a local club of techy geeks,” says Lake County Emergency Manager, BJ Kohlstedt. “They are licensed and authorized by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to provide backup radio communications during declared emergencies, including natural and man-made disasters. They're also part of the Amateur Radio Emergency Services (ARES), which provides communications assistance to non-government entities like hospitals and the American Red Cross when needed.”

On, July 10, the RACES/ARES team gathered in Silver Bay for an exercise with the Minnesota Veterans Home, using the scenario of a failure of fiber-optics and ARMER public safety radios. They set up in the Veterans Home lobby and several other stations around town, and successfully transmitted urgent (contrived) messages, by both voice and data, to (virtual) hospitals and (pretend) families of residents.

“The RACES/ARES team had their equipment set up in 31 minutes,” said Mary Mattila, Safety Officer for the Minnesota Veterans Home. The exercise showed their ability to maintain communications in an emergency, the effectiveness of mutual aid plans, and the benefits of coordination with county emergency management.

Craig Fugate, former Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), called amateur radio operators “oftentimes our last line of defense.” We're fortunate in Lake County that they stand ready to help when needed. Working for no pay, and with their own equipment, they can do amazing things with a radio, a laptop, an antenna mast, or some wires thrown in trees. They are, as Fugate declared, “the ultimate backup.”



RACES/ARES team members review the exercise in the Emergency Management office.



Testing communications coverage at several sites around Silver Bay.