

After Action Report

Radio Skills Class

Feb 17, 2024

Led by Tim Slattery and Leslie Grimm

This was a 2-hour class covering basic FRS/GMRS radio skills and Damage Assessment form message-passing. Participants practiced talking and listening on the radios by playing a crossword puzzle game, where the teams had to call Net Control on the radio to get the clues. Damage Assessment form passing was practiced by taking turns as net control or a field team member passing an incident from a form provided by the instructor. In both exercises participants took turns so everyone could get a chance to practice.

The class was well attended, with 32 people representing 8 CERT neighborhoods and two attendees from Milpitas. Several people brought their own radios and Tim brought about 12 radios and extra batteries. Tim presented the radio skills part first, and Leslie presented the Damage Assessment message passing. There were no slides. Handouts (crossword puzzles, DA forms) were handed out just before they were needed. After class people took handouts of the material covered and a link to online files with more detail. There were some CERT leaders and some hams, but also many people who were very new to using radios.

For Next Time...

On the whole the class went well and people seemed to enjoy it and learn new skills. But having 32 people with radios in one room proved to be a challenge. We had 8 teams playing the crossword puzzle, with 4 teams on one channel (3) and 4 teams on another (1). But it was still noisy with teams close together hearing each other's voices and having a hard time hearing the radios with all the noise in the room. For the future – find a way to have teams out of earshot from each other. An outdoor exercise would facilitate that, or a facility with separate rooms or alcoves. Also, before any clues are given out, each team should do a radio check to be sure they can communicate with their net control. We tried to do that, but not everyone succeeded in getting their radio check before other teams were getting clues. The crossword puzzles had 14 clues. Most groups only managed to get about 2 to 4 of them before time ran out. For the future, try limiting it to 8 clues.

Providing radios to people who didn't have one worked well, and having plenty of them so we didn't have to stop and put new batteries in was good. Some people with their own radios had problems, and they learned something about their radio. It's good for people to bring their own if they have one, but there should be an abundant supply of extra radios and spare batteries as well.

The Damage Assessment Message passing practice went pretty well, though it had to be shortened since we only had about a half hour. There wasn't time to practice a Health and Welfare check, though we did explain what that is. We passed out the DA forms to everyone while the Crossword Puzzle session was finishing, so people could be ready to go when the DA part of the exercise began. The top two lines of the form were filled out and people looked at them as we explained how to report the information on them (since there were no slides). The class used the rest of the form to write on during the next part of the exercise. We combined teams to make a total of 4 teams, since we had 4 sets of materials for this exercise. For the future, groups of 6 would be ideal. The exercise was done "table top" rather than on radio, which turned out to be a good choice since everyone could hear the field team member and net control. Everyone was expected to write the report even though it wasn't their turn to be Net Control so they could experience what it's like. Tim and Leslie visited the teams providing direction as needed.

General recommendations for the future:

Make it a 3-hour class with 1 ½ hours for the radio skills part, a 10-minute break, an hour or so for the damage assessment form, and time at the end for assessment of the drill.

Provide a mentor for each team.

Continue the strategy of speaking directly to the group (no power point slides)
Hand out materials on a "just in time" basis (ie, give out crossword puzzles after teams are formed; give DA example form just before the DA part of the class begins). Wait to distribute the take-home handouts until class ends.