

Fiber Optic Cable cut for South County

XSC-09-02

April 9, 2009

After Action Report/Improvement Plan

April 20, 2009

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the early morning hours of April 9, 2009 unknown persons cut fiber optic telephone cables belonging to ATT. These cables were also leased to Verizon. The cutting of the cables caused an telephone, cell phone and internet outage for all of Santa Clara County south of about Hellyer Ave. The cities of Morgan Hill and Gilroy were affected. The outages also extended into Santa Cruz County and parts of San Benito County.

- Objective 1: Establish communications with the cities of Morgan Hill and Gilroy
- Objective 2: Determine the extent of the affected area.
- Objective 3: Determine any HAM resources needed to help maintain communications via as many paths as possible.

The purpose of this report is to analyze the results, identify strengths to be maintained and built upon, identify potential areas for further improvement, and support development of corrective actions.

Major Strengths

The major strengths identified during this exercise are as follows:

- Races responders at the County were able to establish communications with the Morgan Hill EOC upon arrival at 0715.
- The RACES resource NET was operational by 0715 and had begun tracking RACES personnel to the County EOC and lining up Mutual Aid Communicators (MACs) if needed .
- RACES established communications with Gilroy EOC about 0930 after they activated their RACES personnel.
- Once requests were made for MACs for Morgan Hill and later the City of Gilroy RACES were able to line up, dispatch and track MACs to their assignments in those cities. There were more MACs and other HAMs available for later shifts if the need had been there. We had volunteers from San Francisco and San Mateo Counties to offer additional assistance if it had been needed.

Primary Areas for Improvement

The major area of improvement needed is a method to notify ARES/RACES HAMS to come up on the air when needed when the event is not self alerting as in an earthquake and telephones, cell phones and pagers and internet are not working.

Overall the RACES portion of the event was successful. The response from the MACs was well organized and the Emergency Coordinators for Gilroy and Morgan Hill , their staffs and the responding MACs all performed very well and the efforts were appreciated by the Emergency Managers and their staffs in the respective cities.

SECTION 1: OVERVIEW

Event Details

Event Name

South County telephone outage caused by a fiber optic cut. Santa Clara County RACES Activation number XSC-09-02

Type of Event

This was an unplanned event where all the normal methods of communications for a portion of the County were not working.

Exercise Date

Thursday April 9, 2009

Duration

The outage started at about 0200 hours and was substantially restored by about 2000 hours. SCC RACES manned the County EOC from 0715 Hrs until after 2200 Hrs. One full operational period and part way into a second.

Location

The southern portion of Santa Clara County including the cities of Morgan Hill and Gilroy. All or portions of two adjacent counties were also affected but were not in nor did they affect the Santa Clara County Operational Area.

Mission

The RACES mission for this event was to establish lines of communications between the Santa Clara County Operational Area EOC and the EOCs in Morgan Hill and Gilroy.

Capabilities

The event provided an opportunity for ARES / RACES groups to demonstrate their ability to provide reliable communications when the normal methods have failed. The event also demonstrated the ability to recruit, dispatch and track MACs from unaffected areas of the county to areas that needed additional assistance.

Event Type

Wide spread communications (Telephone, Cell Phone, Internet) outage affecting more than one city.

Santa Clara County RACES Leadership

Larry Carr, DEC, CRO; Scott Morse ADEC, DCRO, Andreas Ott ADEC, DCRO

Participating members

Santa Clara County MACs and members for various city ARES/ RACES groups responded to this event some 43 HAMs from 11 cities/ agencies.

SECTION 2: EVENT SUMMARY

The Santa County RACES involvement of this event started at about 0700 and the first County Race member arrived in the EOC at 0715. Communications was established with Morgan Hill EOC via EOC Radio, the RACES command Net and Control 10 by about 0730 hrs. Attempts were made to contact Gilroy via EOC Radio and all available RACES frequencies with out any success until about 0915 hrs when Gilroy activated their RACES responders and the EC came up on the Command and Resource NETs and when he arrived at the EOC communications was established via the EOC radio and the RACES Command NET. Later in the afternoon Packet communications was also established with Gilroy EOC. The first Request for MACs came in from Morgan Hill by about 0830 and the request was filled and the MACs were dispatched with in 15 minutes. The resources net was established at the County EOC and was transferred from the off site location before noon. That NET continued to accept available MACs and fill requests from both Morgan Hill and Gilroy. Most of the MACs were assigned to public locations to provide communications from the public to the EOC. Other assignments included net control operators and one was dispatched to St. Louise Hospital at their request. The MACs and other resources including County Communications dispatchers and Sheriff's Search and Rescue volunteers remained until local telephone and cell phone began to come back up on line shortly after 2000 hrs. Some of the MAC's are also trained to be VIPs with Cal Fire and a number of them responded to assignments with Cal Fire in Morgan Hill as well.

SECTION 3: ANALYSIS OF CAPABILITIES

Over all the RACES response was exactly what we train for and many of the responders as well as the City EC's stated they were glad they had attended the training sessions and drills.

Challenges to be overcome:

Some of the MACs were not as prepared as they thought they were. Some did not have dual band radios or did not know that they needed to switch over as VHF repeater communications with Santa Clara County EOC drops off just south of Hiway 85 on US 101. The UHF repeater coverage take over down south of there. Some did not think to bring cash as banks and ATMs were out of service and most merchants were not able to take credit cards. Some realized that they needed to be sure their gas tanks were at least ½ full as well. There were a couple of complaints that the MACs did not feel that they were fully briefed or did not fully understand the nature of their assignment. There is also a need to have a method to make those HAMs more visible to the public, since many were placed in location for the public to be able to find them if they had emergency needs.

There was a major difference in the desire for and the use of ARES / RACES HAMs by the two city emergency managers. The two cities affected were taking care of things within their cities and as a result did not feel compelled to share information with the Operational area in the beginning. The Operational Area had a difficult time early on trying to determine the

extent of the problem and what if any resources were needed or going to be needed.

SECTION 4: CONCLUSION

Overall this was a very successful event from the RACES side. RACES demonstrated their ability to respond and quickly establish communication when the normal methods have failed. RACES was able to quickly establish communications with both affected cities as well as Santa Cruz County via several paths. The training classes and drills have been effective as RACES was able to respond quickly and move MACs where they were needed while being tracked and supervised to comply with DSW requirements.

Recommendation for future events

1. Find a way to notify key RACES members of an event when telephones, internet and cell phones are not operational.
2. ARES/ RACES members must explore methods to alert members when there is a non self alerting event and normal communications methods are down.

SECTION 5: LESSONS LEARNED

- A. The County RACES training and drills appear to have been effective and we need to find ways to get more of the MACs to attend and fully participate.
- B. It is very difficult to contact someone in an affected area where the normal phone and cell and internet systems are down.
- C. The procedure to dispatch the MACs to an event of this type worked very well and the trained NCOs performed very well and kept things moving smoothly.
- D. The receiving agency needs to have a staging area away from city hall or the EOC to avoid adding to the congestion already there.
- E. There need to be a little better communications as to how long the volunteers would be needed so that relief personnel could be obtained and have time to arrive on location.
- F. The resource net needs to be aware of and communicate to those responding things like travel frequencies, arrival frequencies, as well as any hardships or hazards in the area.(no ATMs workings, many merchants not taking credit or debit cards etc.)
- G. Due to long travel times to South County there may be a need for a staging area somewhere so that the assistance can arrive more quickly after it was requested.
- H. The receiving cities may want a staging area for the MACs somewhere away from the EOC .