

STORM / FLOOD ARES ACTIVATION January 4 – 6, 2008
SEC/DEC Afteraction Report

FRIDAY JANUARY 4: A major winter storm hit the Northwest District of Nevada on at approximately 1:00pm. First to activate was Dee Arnold, KA7LOZ for Skywarn in support of the NWS office in Reno. Skywarn was assisted by many amateurs around the NV Northwest District. The storm dumped rain consistently from about 0600 until 1730 when it turned to snow, making travel hazardous. Additionally, wind gusts had been reported as high as 56 mph in Douglas County, to 46 mph in Washoe County. Washoe County EC, Bob Miller, WA6MTY has been working since prior to the storm with the Regional Emergency Operation Center and it's management team. ARES Membership was asked to be in standby mode.

I was contacted by Barry Betman, K6ST in Truckee about the availability of mutual aid being sent from Washoe County, Nevada to Tahoe City in California. At the time, 1730, roads were not passable due to whiteout conditions being reported along I-80 between Reno and Truckee. According to authorities, blizzard conditions were in place, and motorists were advised to not travel any of the mountain routes for safety reasons. Wind speeds were recorded over mountain passes at well over 100 mph. On that basis, I advised that I would be unable to dispatch mutual aid operators to that area.

SATURDAY JANUARY 5: As SEC, I was called by phone at 0540 this morning by Dee Arnold, KA7LOZ, and informed that a levee had broken in Lyon County, and that several hundred homes had been flooded by about 3 feet of water. Evacuations were already underway at that time. The Lyon County ARES group, aiding Lyon County Search and Rescue initially were on scene to provide communications. Otto Tune, KV7J of the Nevada Department of Emergency Management was opening operations at their HQ in Carson City, and kept all advised of rescue efforts and conditions. Bruce Wade, W7TA, AEC to the Reno ARC Chapter was dispatched to the shelter in Fernley, and would keep us advised of shelter needs. Information was relayed that Gov. Jim Gibbons was declaring a disaster area in Lyon County and would be going to the area.

Skywarn reactivated by KA7LOZ at about 1600, as the next wave of the storm was incoming and more snow forecast for the area.

Statewide IRLP connections were made through the NARRI system on Channel 8 of the Western Reflector, Node 9258 and Echolink NV-gate # 152566 for weather reports and possible mutual aid. While no formal net was set up here, checkins and weather reports were given from Elko, Las Vegas and Tonopah to NWS in Reno as relayed by myself. Glenn Hale, KB7REO, Southern District EC who was in Tonopah advised that he was standing by should help be needed. Thanks to Kent, W7AOR for keeping that mode of operation open to us for statewide nets, information and resource use.

At about 1500 a request was made by Lyon County ARES for 2 mutual aid ARES operators from Washoe County to assist with shelter operations in Fernley. WA6MTY then dispatched Darrell Upson, WA6ADZ and Doug Abramson, KA7FOO who departed for the site. At 16:17, Lyon County NCS advised that the mutual aid was no longer needed, and the 2 operators were advised to return to Washoe County. They were contacted while en route, and headed home. Skywarn continued active until evening, with continued reports by amateurs from around the area to NWS. Many thanks for all of those who assisted and were willing to help the operation.

THE FOLLOWING FROM DEE ARNOLD, KA7LOZ – ADEC, NWS: Without the leadership in place in ARES we could not be as effective as we were. Plus the cooperation with the men and women at the NWS. Approximately 35 hours on air and over 100 calls into WX7RNO were made. The ability to be able to call a certain place and receive the information they needed was outstanding. We needed someone in Coleville/Walker area for a burned area observations and hourly report. We were able to get Mark Spencer, WA8SME in Coleville to not only give us that information but also got in his truck and drove over to the other side of the valley and give us an eyeball information of how the area looked. The Radio Operators in the Northern Nevada area came through for the NWS. -- Dee KA7LOZ ADEC NWS RENO

THE FOLLOWING FROM PATTY POLISH, KE7JIV – LYON COUNTY EMERGENCY COORDINATOR: We were called out at 0430 hours and stood down at 1730 hours. We used Patty Polish, KE7JIV; Bob Freeman, KE7ATZ; John Abrott, KD7NHC; Leonard Mitchell, KC7PET; Jim Berryman-Shaffer, KD7ZKO; Brian Freitag, KE7JIO; and Gene Willard, KE6VIM. There were two responding from Washoe - Doug Abramson, KA7FOO and Darrell Upson WA6ADZ. We had Gretchen Penaluna, N7RAB on standby if needed. -- So we used 8 LCARES and 2 WCARES for a total of 10. We put in a total of 96 hours based on travel time from portal to portal. Essentially we were the backup communications. It was a good thing we responded. As you can imagine the phone lines to various county contacts were almost always busy, so our communications network was a good way to pass on information. We had one operator at the EOC in Yerington, two operators in Silver Springs, one to two operators at the Evacuation Shelter at the Fernley High School, and three operators at the ICP located the Fire Station in Fernley. The ICP relayed information to the Evacuation Shelter regarding the number of people coming to the shelter via the evacuation vehicles. The evacuation shelter relayed information about their needs from dry clothes to heaters to diapers. The ICP kept the EOC informed of resources being used and additional resources needs. Some of the communication between myself and the EOC occurred over a cell phone but primarily were passed through the ICP operators. The ICP operators informed Command when a person requiring medical assistance was in route via helicopter or ground, as they were monitoring 155.160 (National Search and Rescue frequency) Red Cross was in contact with us after they set up at the Evacuation Shelter. We requested that the National Weather Service call us every 15 minutes with a weather update rather than us trying to chase down the weather. In addition when Bob Freeman, KE7ATZ called you for assistance it was done via the radio rather than phone as his cellular service went down. Good thing we have these darn radios. THEY WORK!!

LESSONS LEARNED: This note is a compilation of input from various sources and is combined as a general learning plan.

First of all, we need to establish a "Leadership Command Net" for these callouts for the purpose of receiving and granting mutual aid and for general information between leadership. For the Northwest District, it would appear that the Virginia Peak, 147.180 + machine might work best. It has great coverage in all directions, and even covers into Lovelock and Susanville. Lyon and Churchill Counties and Carson City DEM all seem to hit and hear full quieting. Not sure about Storey County, but that is an issue we can work on.

Concerning the operations at RENO NWS: When an operator decided to 'monitor' other communications and then attempted to put out a rumor over the air that "I-80 would be closed and not opened until Monday morning"; we must instruct our amateur operators that they are there to provide support to the served agency. They are not to release any information that has not been approved by that agency and at the very least not to supply grist for the rumor mill. As I stated over the radio at the time, the Nation Weather Service does not close roads. They make recommendations to the NHP and in conjunction with the NDOT (and in this particular situation, probably Cal Trans), a decision is made on any particular road's status. Also, when we have advance warning of an event coming, as in the case of storms (unlike fires where it is drop of the hat), we should arrange for and ask for operators to be on "standby" in case a mutual aid request is made. This can be done by putting out the QST for such operators days in advance. Shifts for monitoring can also be pre-arranged. Dee put in some very long hours. I think that having others waiting and ready to assist NWS in shifts may also be considered for these events in future. One served agency comment I received was, "*I think Bob needs to be congratulated on the smooth running of Washoe County ARES/RACES team. He has put a great amount of work into training, drilling and testing of them and it showed. Very smooth transition from normal to emergency status. The whole team deserves more than just a pat on the back.*" I agree.

FINAL NOTE FROM SEC: I apologize in advance if I have left anyone out, but I would like to thank the following amateurs for rising to the task, spending many long hours over a weekend, in front of computers, radios and weather stations; and for braving the elements when called upon to provide service, road conditions, weather information mutual aid and most importantly, assistance to our communities:

Bob , WA6MTY - Dee , KA7LOZ - Gary , K7VY – Bruce, W7TA – Darrell, WA6ADZ - Doug, KA7FOO- Patty, KE7JIV and her Lyon County ARES Team – Paul, KC7CZX and his Churhill County ARES Team – Jack, W3FUN – Chris KD7DZZ – Southern DEC, Glenn, KB7REO – AD7CD – Andy, KD7ZEV – Pat, KE7GDS – John, N7UPI – Dave, KE7LC – Barry, K6ST from Truckee, SV Section - Tony, K7AIR – Tom, K5RC – W8SME – Otto, KV7J -