

Subject: San Jacinto Mountain Emergency Communications

Meeting Date/Time: Monday, December 11, 2017 0800-1100

Meeting Purpose: To discuss the status of current radio communication capabilities and detail possibilities to improve emergency communications as they pertain to the Emergency Management Department (EMD) RACES program and WNKI AM Radio operation.

Meeting Location: Idyllwild Fire Protection District  
54160 Maranatha Rd, Idyllwild, CA. 92549

Meeting Attendance:

Bill Tell, MHRC	John Hawkins, County Fire Chief
Tom Unwin, MHRC	Jody Hageman, County Fire Sr. PIO
Patrick Reitz, IFPD Chief	Chet Ashbaugh, County Fire Communications Manager
Brian Tisdale, District 3 Office	Jerry Hagen, EMD
Jeff VanWagenen, Executive Office	Dan Bates, EMD
Bruce Barton, EMD	

Introductions and Ground Rules

History of AM Radio Emergency Communications. Bill Tell provided a history of the Mile High Radio Club (MHRC), WNKI 1610 AM Radio and involvement in routine and emergency communications. The outline of points provided by Bill is included with these meeting minutes.

The group agreed that there is value in the emergency and routine public service communications provided by MHRC through WNKI AM Radio. These include public safety communications and instructions approved through the appropriate government agency that can alert residents and visitors to hazards on the Mountain.

Bill provided a review of current radio equipment, locations and function. WNKI is currently housed under the IFPD. Chief Reitz reiterated the importance of emergency communications on the Mountain and support for WNKI. Chief Hawkins made the point that routine communications are also important and should be included in discussions and planning.

The written agreement between MHRC WNKI and IFPD was provided to the group for review. Chief Hawkins noted concerns that some of the agreement language contains administrative elements that cross over jurisdictional boundaries. Example: There needs to be collaboration between the appropriate government agency PIOs when WNKI sends out emergency messages. It was recommended that all partner agencies be allowed to review and comment on the written agreement.

Bill discussed the current WNKI AM Radio broadcast range limitations across the San Jacinto Mountains and the need for infrastructure upgrades to improve that range. Bill also discussed additional capabilities, such as digitally integrated messaging that could be employed. Improvements to broadcast range will also require the acquisition of additional equipment sites. A number of options for sites were discussed including the use of existing PSEC sites. Concerns highlighted were a “private entity” occupying a government site and costs associated with utilizing PSEC space. These and other issues involving site locations will need to be thoroughly understood and resolved moving forward.

The MHRC has created a comprehensive strategic plan that details WNKI's purpose and history, capabilities, broadcast limitations and details needed improvements. The plan includes a list of equipment and costs that was referenced in the meeting. (Both Chief Reitz and Bill Tell provided a copy of the plan to the group via email latter in the day).

Chief Hawkins briefly referenced discussions with Bill Tell and reiterated his support for improving. He recommended that an overall plan that includes WHKI roles and integration into routine and emergency communications is needed. The recommendation was well received by the group.

After some discussion Jeff Van Wagenen identified needs generally fall into the following categories:

- An overall plan for routine and emergency communications
- New or upgraded radio equipment and securing additional and improved radio equipment sites
- Improved public awareness of WNKI

**Action Item:** The group unanimously agreed that the Mountain Area Safety Taskforce (MAST) would be the best group to take on the development of a comprehensive plan that provides for integrated and cooperative routine and emergency communications on the Mountain. Said plan will consider the needs identified above and involve all of the mountain area partners. This will be discussed at the next scheduled MAST meeting.

**Action Item:** At the next scheduled MAST meeting, request that a subcommittee of MAST be formed with the goal of on-going evaluation of routine and emergency communications and development of the above plan.

At the end of the meeting there was additional brief discussion related to limitations to RACES radio communication capabilities. Bill Tell has requested consideration for the placement of a linked repeater system, necessary hardware and antennas owned and maintained by the MHRC within the PSEC maintained facility at Range Peak. This proposal has previously been provided to the EMD. It was discussed that Ranger Peak would be optimal for placement of a repeater but a number of other sites were mentioned as possible alternatives. Problem considerations related to the placement of the repeater as requested include recurring PSEC costs and the placement of “privately owned” radio equipment in or on government facilities. Discussion of this element will be included in the planning process going forward.

**Action Item:** The communications plan will include the evaluation of optimal locations for the placement of the repeater for improved RACES communications capabilities.

All present at the meeting agreed to support on-going activities and work cooperatively to improve routine and emergency communications while the plan is in development. One item that may be

accomplished immediately is re-placement of signage along the highway informing residents and visitors to tune into WNKI AM Radio. Cal Trans has provided some degree of resistance to this initiative. Jeff Van Wagenen suggested that he and Brian Tisdale could help with communicating the importance of replacing the signage to Cal Trans and elected officials if needed.

**Action Item:** Chief Reitz will email Jeff concerning communications with Cal Trans related to re-placement of the signage. Jeff and Brian will follow up with CalTrans as needed.