

Socorro County Local Emergency Operations Plan
Annex B — Communications
April 28, 2009

I. PURPOSE

This Annex provides information and guidance concerning available communications systems within Socorro County. The total communications system is discussed, and procedures for its use during emergency operations are outlined.

Communication is vital to effective and efficient preparedness and to response and recovery activities during emergency operations. Effective communications networks exist in Socorro County for natural disasters and technological emergencies. Available equipment will be used for natural disaster and technological emergency operations, and augmented during periods of international tension, accidental missile launch, or enemy attack.

II. SITUATION

Socorro County is served by a number of communications facilities.

- A. Normal communications in the County will be used as available during an emergency, although they may quickly become overloaded, and will likely need to be supplanted by radio and other networks.
- B. Public Safety facilities are always available; they include the New Mexico State Police (NMSP) and local public safety (police, sheriff, fire) agencies.
- C. Emergency Medical networks are in regular use by ambulances and hospital, and may need to be augmented in a disaster.
- D. The Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES) is available on short notice, and the Socorro Amateur Radio Association (SARA) has outfitted a communications trailer which is property of Socorro County and is kept at the Socorro Emergency Operations Center (EOC).
- E. Other agencies and jurisdictions within Socorro County possess communication capabilities which may be called upon as needed. This includes Federal agencies and State Forestry, especially as concerns wildland firefighting.
- F. The Socorro EOC is staffed as needed by personnel assigned to the Communications Division; sufficient communications equipment and capabilities are available to provide the communications necessary for most emergency situations. In severe emergencies, augmentation may be required.

III. ASSUMPTIONS

In an emergency, the versatility and ubiquity of cell phones can rapidly become the downfall of the system. It may quickly become overloaded to the point where it becomes nearly useless for emergency communications. In addition, many systems have little or no backup power. It is feasible to have a list of important cell phone users who can receive priority during emergencies, and selection of carriers with good backup power would make cell phones more useful for planning purposes.

A likely more productive effort, and one that in any case is mandated, is to have all radios programmed with the already-defined interoperation frequencies. Emergency personnel need to have the necessary training and information to operate smoothly during an incident. Supplementary networks need to be in place and ready, and to be tested often enough for confidence.

IV. ORGANIZATION and RESPONSIBILITIES

- A. The Communications Officer will direct, coordinate, and supervise all activities, including maintenance of a current roster of personnel to ensure recall or notification on short notice. The Communications Officer is responsible for carrying out emergency operations and advising the Incident Commander on matters pertaining to communications.
- B. The Communications Support Group consists of Coordinators who organize personnel and coordinate use of equipment to establish radio nets to provide expanded communications during emergencies. This will normally include Amateur Radio, and may also include Citizens' Band and other personal radio services, Business Band, and Civil Air Patrol. An Amateur Radio Coordinator will typically be appointed at the outset, and other coordinators will be appointed as circumstances warrant.

V. CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

- A. The Emergency Operating Center (EOC): If conditions warrant, emergency operations activities for Socorro County, the City of Socorro, or the Village of Magdalena will be conducted at the EOC located at 198 Neel Avenue, Socorro, New Mexico. The EOC is equipped with adequate communications equipment for transmitting and receiving, and due to its location can be activated in a timely and efficient manner. The EOC is augmented by a mobile communications support unit, operated by the Amateur Radio Emergency Service, with versatile communications capabilities, including simultaneous operation on HF, VHF, and UHF bands, and a mobile repeater operating on VHF amateur frequencies.

B. Public Safety facilities:

1. The City of Socorro has a dispatch center co-located with and operated by the Police Department. It also dispatches the City's Fire Department and several volunteer departments.
2. Fire Departments in the northern part of the county are dispatched by Valencia County.
3. The New Mexico State Police (NMSP) office is located just north of the City of Socorro and dispatches NMSP officers in and near Socorro County. NMSP has radio networks throughout the state. The County Sheriff and the Magdalena Village Marshal are also dispatched by NMSP.
4. Socorro County also has access to the State Mobile Command Post. When activated, it can provide communications resources with all emergency frequencies.

C. Other agencies and jurisdictions within Socorro County possess communication capabilities which may be called upon. The Communications Officer should maintain the necessary lists and agreements. All radio systems should include the standard interoperability frequencies, and must at a minimum include "VCALL" (155.7525 MHz) or "UCALL" (453.2125 MHz).

D. Facilities should be maintained in a state of readiness. They should include:

1. Backup power
2. Transient protection (lightning, power surges, and Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP) protection.
3. Telephone (Common Carrier):
 - a. Telephone service during emergency operations is accommodated through an installed and readily available telephone line from the EOC to the local telephone exchange, which has backup power.
 - b. Priority service restoration arrangements shall be made by the Executive Staff and/or the Communications Coordinator.
 - c. Mobile (primarily cellular) telephone service is provided by a variety of companies, and their emergency power resources vary widely. Arrangements should be made for priority service.
4. Radio systems capable of operation on all of the interoperation frequencies prescribed for the frequency bands in regular use in the area, with programming capabilities for expeditiously adding other frequencies if needed.

E. Notification and warning systems:

1. Notification of Key Officials (refer also to Annex C, Warning)
 - a. The Emergency Operations Center will alert key City/Village/County officials, and others on the EOC staff, by all means available, in the event of an emergency.
 - b. Tone-activated receivers/pagers may be utilized to provide warning to various agencies and the public.
2. The State Emergency Altering System (EAS)

The EAS provides disaster information and instruction to the public through the electronic media.

- a. Statewide Activation: The Governor, the State Emergency Operations Center, and the Santa Fe Weather Service Office have the authority to activate the State EAS to provide information to the public.
- b. Localized Activation: Local officials have the authority to activate the EAS, in certain instances, to provide information to the people in that operational area.

VI. ADMINISTRATION AND LOGISTICS

A. Records

The Communications Center will maintain records of all expenses incurred by their communications activities. The Executive Group will ensure that adequate records of local government expenses are maintained.

B. Training

Each agency or organization assigning personnel to the EOC for Communications purposes is responsible for ensuring that those individuals are adequately trained to use the equipment, are familiar with the procedures of the EOC, and understand the unique operating procedures.

C. Plan Maintenance

The Communications Officer will be responsible for the maintenance and improvement of this Annex. The Annex will be reviewed, updated, and modified as necessary, but not less than annually.