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US Ham Operators and Government Test HF Radio Communications

Disaster Communications Compatibility Exercise Uses Automatic Link Establishment

Washington, DC, and San Francisco, CA – 27 March 2014 - US Amateur Radio operators (ham operators) and Federal Government radio stations are engaged in a nationwide test of their capability to communicate with each other by shortwave radio, in case of an emergency or disaster. They are participating in a 12-day joint readiness exercise running from 27 March through 7 April, covering all areas of USA, using a digital High Frequency (HF) radio system known as Automatic Link Establishment (ALE). This High Frequency Interoperability Exercise 2014 (HFIE-2014) runs concurrent with the federal National Exercise Program (NEP) 2014.

ALE is a standardized digital signaling protocol used by each radio service, ham and government, to establish HF communications between their own stations. For the first time, the government regulatory agencies (FCC and NTIA) have authorized these stations to communicate with each other using ALE. HF radio enables long distance communication independent of terrestrial communications infrastructure, internet, or satellites.

To facilitate the communication testing, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) secured temporary authority from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Federal Government radio stations and hams are allowed to communicate with each other using ALE during the exercise. Under existing rules, hams have secondary access to 5 HF radio channels on which Government stations are the primary users.

HF radios used by Federal Government stations have the ALE capability built into the hardware. Amateur Radio operators have implemented the same ALE protocols using their personal computers with ham radio equipment and software. The Special Temporary Authority allows for on-the-air testing of interoperability between the hardware and software-generated ALE implementations.

Participation in the interoperability exercise is open to all ALE-capable Federal Government radio stations and to all ALE-capable US Amateur Radio stations. While five channels are available if needed, the test plan calls for using only two of the channels in order to minimize impact on other stations not participating in the exercise. Specifics of the STA are as follows:

- (1) Temporary modification of the authority granted at NTIA Manual section 7.3.8(4), which authorizes Federal Government stations to communicate with stations in the Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service, to allow communications with any Amateur Radio station utilizing Automatic Link Establishment, limited to the five channels in the 5 MHz band which are available to the Amateur Radio Service on a secondary basis, for the period March 27th through April 7th 2014.
- (2) Concurrent waiver by the FCC of that part of FCC rule 97.111(a)(4) which limits communications with US Government stations to transmissions necessary to providing

communications in RACES, limited to the five channels in the 5 MHz band which are available to the Amateur Radio Service on a secondary basis, for the period March 27th through April 7th 2014.

The HFIE-2014 is a semi-annual ham radio readiness exercise coordinated by the HFLINK organization <http://hflink.com> and the Global ALE High Frequency Network <http://hflink.net>. It is open to all ALE-capable ham radio stations. Technical and operational guidelines for ham and federal government stations are available at: <http://hflink.net/hfie2014>

National Exercise Program (NEP) 2014 is a complex emergency preparedness exercise with activities sponsored by government departments and agencies, designed to educate and prepare the whole community for complex, large-scale disasters and emergencies. As part of the National Preparedness Goal (NPG), it enables a collaborative, whole community approach to national preparedness that engages individuals, families, communities, the private and nonprofit sectors, faith-based organizations and all levels of government.

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