



Amateur Radio Emergency Service
Santa Barbara South County
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COMMUNICATIONS IN A DISASTER

A Guide for the General Public

Tips on Telephone Use

- DO NOT DIAL 9-1-1 unless you have an emergency threatening life or property. Even then, understand that resources may be taxed to the extreme and, even if you get through, emergency crews may not be able to respond to help you. Tune in to your local broadcast radio or television station for instructions.
- If there is damage to telephone equipment, facilities, or wires, service will be down.
- After an earthquake, be sure all phone handsets are in their cradles; if one is “off the hook,” you will not be able to make or receive calls.
- When trying to make a phone call after a disaster, listen several minutes for a dial tone. Each time you push the hookswitch it will start the timing process over again.
- If you get a fast busy signal or “all circuits are busy” recording, hang up and try again.
- Have at least one phone that plugs directly into the phone jack in the wall. If a phone has an AC power adapter (cordless phone) it will not work if the power is out.
- If telephone service remains uninterrupted, you may be able to dial a long distance number. Have a relative or friend outside the local area (preferably in another state) you and your family can call who can relay messages to each other and to other concerned family members. Every member of the family should carry this number with them.
- If your residential or commercial phone service is out, check the nearest pay phones. Those lines will often be restored before other services.
- Have a plan to reunite your family or learn of each member’s location that does not depend on the telephone (a location to rendezvous, etc.).

Tips on Cell Phone Use

- Cell phone service WILL be unavailable and/or unreliable for several days or even weeks and this has been proven in recent disasters. Think about how much you use them in your daily life. Be sure your children don’t rely on them to keep in touch with you; have a backup plan.

Other Tips

- Do not depend on your Amateur radio neighbor to contact family members here or out of the area. They may not have the proper equipment and they may not be able to contact anyone to deliver your message. An Amateur radio network is usually established after 48 hours, allowing people time to settle into shelters, alternate housing, etc. Amateurs trained for emergency communications will be away from home helping with the disaster relief effort at hospitals, emergency operating centers, the Red Cross, Salvation Army, etc.
- Consider using low-cost Family Radio Service radios to keep in touch with neighbors and family members. The range is 1-2 miles and no license is required. Set up a network of these radios in your neighborhood to help each other in a disaster.