



The Salvation Army

Emergency Disaster Services

Salvation Army Team Emergency Radio Network



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Amateur Radio Operators Play Key Role In Napa Fire Animal Rescue Operation



Napa, CA (10/18/2017) – During a four day period ending Sunday (10/15/17), local amateur radio operators, led by the Mt. Diablo Amateur Radio Club (MDARC), played a major role in the Napa Fire Animal Evacuation operation. This effort was based at the Napa Valley Horseman’s Association Ranch.

Ranch President Mark Evans (KE6O), put out a call through social media for amateur radio help. Peg Gardner (KJ6MXT) saw the call and posted it on the MDARC group email. A group was established and led by Pete Harris (KE6ZIW) and Gardner.

With Harris and Gardner, others who helped during the next four days were Elaine Baker (KJ6MXP), Bill Shaffer (N6SGT), Klaus Berkner (K6KHB), Dave Piersall (N6ORB), Erica Iwinski (KJ6APC), Lisa Martin (KM6JBW), Frank O’Leary (KF6FIO), Kathy Wells (KK6KDW) and Lawrence Koga (KI6DUE).

There were two primary roles for the amateur radio operators. The first was to establish a base station and net control at the Ranch using a UHF repeater on Sugarloaf Mountain outside of Napa, and one on Mt. Saint Helena, north of Calistoga.

The other was to be members of the mobile animal evacuation teams that went behind fire lines, often in rural areas or where cell towers were down, to find and evacuate various animals that were reported by their owners as being left behind when they had to suddenly flee last week due to the fires. The mobile teams consisted of a veterinarian, an amateur radio operator, a driver, and a firefighter escort. They drove in pickup trucks hauling large animal trailers.

Reports of animals needing evacuation, their locations, descriptions, names, where they might be hiding, etc., were sent to the mobile teams by amateur radio, who went to look for those animals and evacuate them if possible.

During the operation more than 200 horses, and many dogs, cats, goats, chickens, rabbits and even a tortoise, were found and brought to the ranch or other local animal shelters. Stray domestic and ranch animals that were found behind fire lines were also picked up when possible. Food and water was left for animals that could not be found, and the teams returned at later times to again try to find them.

A team of approximately 15 volunteer veterinarians at the Ranch assessed and organized care of the animals. A couple of animals had to be euthanized after being delivered to the Ranch due to serious burn injuries, but the great majority were saved.

There were many other volunteers at the Ranch. Many helped to care for the animals, some cooked and served meals, some delivered hay, some went to local stores to get supplies and equipment, and some transported animals to other facilities when the Ranch ran out of room.



Very smoky conditions from surrounding hills and mountains that were on fire came and went. A couple of times volunteers were told to be ready to evacuate quickly. Harris described it as “a dynamic, fluid and energetic event.”

Evans later said, “We absolutely could not have done this without the hams”. He was so impressed with their contribution that he is considering establishing a permanent amateur radio station in one of the buildings located on a hill at the Ranch.

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