**Physical Preparation for Crisis, Part V: Communications**

**The ability to communicate, i.e., the flow of timely information from and into a region facing crisis is absolutely critical**. It is necessary **PRIOR to a crisis situation** because it provides the ability to receive warning of developing dangerous situations and provide information that may be suppressed or ignored by media and governmental officials. It is necessary **DURING a crisis** as it may be the only way to maintain contact with the “outside world”, coordinate a proper response, or even call for assistance. It is necessary **AFTER a crisis has passed** so that assessment and reorientation/rebuilding can occur.

**It must be assumed that in a crisis situation, normal modes of communication will be disabled and preplanning must establish alternative methods of communication**. After the Joplin tornado, for example, the only flow of information into and out of the area was via ham radio operators.

For purposes of communications, telephones, radios and the internet should be considered.

I. **Telephones**

1. **Corded land-line phones**- Consideration should be given to maintaining a corded phone (corded phone as opposed to a rechargeable, portable phone). They will often work during electrical outages because they are powered through the phone lines. In such a situation they could still be used after cell phones had exhausted their charge.
2. **Cell phones**- Their convenience is unsurpassed but there are things to consider in a crisis situation.
   1. If the electrical grid is down there should be an alternative way to recharge the phone. Charging via a car charger is one way. Hand cranked and solar cell phone chargers are other possibilities
   2. Even if there are no power issues, it may be impossible to utilize your cell phone during a crisis because the system will be overloaded with people trying to make calls.

II. **Radios**

1. **AM/FM radios**- They will allow you to keep abreast of local news and conditions and to receive emergency broadcasts. Consideration should be given to utilizing radios that have the ability to be powered via solar cells or hand cranking.
2. **General coverage receivers**- Radios able to receive the basic short wave spectrum will provide the ability to know what is going on outside of the country. They will give you the ability to hear other’s perspectives and interpretations of events as they are happening. The ability to power via solar cells or hand cranking would be very helpful. Digital frequency displays should be considered when choosing a short wave radio.
3. **NOAA weather radios**- These give the ability to be alerted to threatening weather situations or other threats that are developing.
4. **Radio scanners**- Information obtained by listening to emergency frequencies used by police, military and other emergency responders may provide a wealth of information during times of disaster or major crisis.
5. **Two way radio transmitters**- This category would include walkie-talkies, CB radios and General Mobile Radio Service radios. These modalities give added ability to communicate because they also have the ability to transmit. However, **their range is very limited** and, therefore, not an option that could be counted on except in small neighborhood.
6. **Amateur (HAM) radios**-This is the best option for long-distance, two-way communications. There is equipment that is mobile, hand held or base stationed. You must be legally licensed to be a HAM operator and there are levels of qualification that define the level of frequencies the operator may utilize. Ham radios provide local and even international two-way communications via shortwave broadcasts during emergencies.

III. **The internet**- As long as the power grid is up and running, the ability to communicate via e-mail, instant messaging and even Skype should not be underestimated. However, the system can be quickly overloaded and is vulnerable to a number of scenarios where it could be quickly brought down.

IV. **Establish a local communications network system**

1. **Have a ham operator capability in Bristol, Kingsport and Johnson City**. These will be centers for acquiring, coordinating and distributing timely information and messages.
2. **A notification grid for each area** can be developed for those interested in participating.
3. **Each HAM operator center could be utilized to transfer information via the notification grid** to people in its own area via telephone, e-mail, courier, etc.

**V Establish a family communications plan**- When a disaster strikes, your family may be separated by school, work, errands, etc. A plan needs to be in place for how you will contact one another. Make sure that every family member has a complete list of local contact numbers and select a friend or relative who lives outside of the state for family members to notify that they are safe.

1. **Plan for family members**: Each family member should carry a list that includes
   1. **Local** contact information:
      1. Name and home address of local contact person
      2. Their home and cell phone numbers
      3. Their e-mail address
      4. Designated place to meet if you are forced to move from home. Note: Have a primary and alternate place designated.
   2. **Out** **of state** contact information:
      1. Name and home address of out of state contact person:
      2. Their home and cell phone numbers
      3. Their e-mail address

c. In addition, each family member should have **pictures of their other family members**. These pictures could be copied and distributed to media to help locate anyone missing.