

THE HAMNET / IRESC COALITION



Within individual countries, most emergency planning authorities are familiar with national organisations of Radio Amateurs that voluntarily pledge their effort and equipment to aid in disaster relief. Well-known examples are RAYNET in the United Kingdom and ARES in the USA and HAMNET in South Africa.

IRESC is similar, in that the members are volunteer radio amateurs who give their time and facilities to help with emergency communications.

However, rather than working at local or national level within one country, IRESC is a **world-wide** organisation that tries to provide communication links across country borders from disaster zones to anywhere in the world that needs to make contact. Of course, many IRESC members are also members of their own national bodies.

The permanent facility developed by IRESC centres on the global 'Echolink' voice-over-Internet network, which is exclusive to licensed radio amateurs and therefore secure and controlled. When a major emergency occurs, the IRESC organisation strives to link up to ham radio communications in and out of the disaster zone, interfacing speech (and even text) with their dedicated network at the nearest point of Internet connectivity.

In this way, direct two-way communications can occur between the disaster area and agencies that can help, even if they are located on opposite sides of the planet.

By streaming the communications audio to the web, anyone can monitor traffic regardless of location while not interfering with busy radio channels. With its dedicated Echolink Conference facility, IRESC has full control over traffic flow and manned networks follow agreed amateur radio emergency communications protocols.

All traffic is logged for future examination and training, and background teams use varied Internet tools to both research and publish live information for the benefit of all. The IT hardware is hosted by IRESC members, meaning that access to the base servers is always possible and under full control.

The IRESC command and support structure offers several advantages due to its truly international nature. Because there are active members in different time zones all over the world, efforts can go on around the clock without any one controller or support team becoming exhausted. Background data and logging are web-based. If any of the systems suffer loss of connectivity, the facility exists to re-establish them from an unaffected part of the world. Personal data, such as 'lost and found' information, is handled discretely and is passed only to agencies with appropriate credentials.

IRESC does not deploy members to disaster zones because the organisation does not have, nor seeks, external funding. Instead, the approach is to galvanise and use the ham operators who are local to the disaster zone, to enhance the official communications channels and perhaps re-route lower priority traffic away from them. However, if asked, IRESC would provide and operate Internet communications terminals at the premises of support agencies.

Being an international body, IRESC strongly adheres to the principals that also bind together the worldwide amateur radio movement. It aims to bring together fellow voluntary enthusiasts wherever they live, to work together to help others regardless of their race, colour, religion or politics.

IRESC is pleased to link the national organisations of countries whenever this could be advantageous, working with any group but without any predisposition or allegiance. HAMNET is proud to be associated with the IRESC concept and organisation and also serves on their Management.

IRESC members are currently working to make the backbone Internet operation as resilient and robust as possible. The development of portable Echolink-to-Radio interfaces is proceeding with the desire to ship these to disaster zones if needed. A special experimentation permit has been granted to a UK IRESC member in order to explore HF-to-Internet emergency radio linking issues. IRESC maintains a website with a News service that is updated daily, at www.iresc.org.

If you would like to find out more, please contact the External Affairs Officer, Steve Richards G4HPE at g4hpe@iresc.org. Our live incident web-streaming and background data RSS feeds are established as required, but IRESC generates occasional press releases to a list of subscribers.

You would be welcome to join us.