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Amateur radio system ready to go at MCHD

MOBILE, Alabama — During natural disasters, amateur radio stations are often used as a means of emergency communication when landlines, cell phones and other conventional means of connecting fail. For this reason, the Mobile County Health Department maintains an amateur radio station at its Emergency Command Center inside the Newburn Health Center.

Quinn Currie, a Mobile Medical Reserve Corps volunteer, recently examined MCHD’s equipment. An engineering student at the University of South Alabama and an Eagle Scout, Currie is a licensed radio amateur – also known as a ham operator. He is the son of James Currie, MCHD’s graphics communication specialist.

“Quinn has signed a memorandum of understanding with the health department to be our ham radio operator in the event of an emergency,” said Brittany Stambuk, the Mobile Medical Reserve Corps coordinator.

While at Newburn, Stambuk said Currie toured the command center and emergency preparation rooms, practiced on the radio and finally went on the roof to ensure the antennas and satellite dishes were in good working condition.

An article this week in USA Today expressed how important amateur radio operators were in gathering and sharing information during Hurricane Irma. “We take for granted our communications,” said Etta LoPresti, emergency management coordinator for Indian River County. “But when you have something catastrophic like they do in the Keys and in the west coast of Florida, where you’re not going to have communication, these amateur radio operators take care of things for us.”

The largest disaster response by amateur radio operators in the United States took place during Hurricane Katrina. More than 1,000 ham operators from across the country converged on the Gulf Coast to provide emergency communications assistance. Later, Congressional hearings highlighted the response as one of the few examples of what went right in the disaster relief effort.

The Mobile Medical Reserve Corps is sponsored by MCHD. Both organizations aim to promote, improve and protect the health of Mobile County. The unit’s focus is to recruit medical and public health volunteers to build capacity to provide support for local emergency response and to advance the health priorities set by the U.S. Surgeon General.

Currently, almost 1,000 Medical Reserve Corps units comprised of more than 197,600 volunteers can be found through the United States. For more information on joining the Mobile County team, contact Stambuk by phone at 251-544-2196 or by email at bstambuk@mchd.org. You may also visit www.MobileMRC.org or www.facebook.com/MobileMRC/ for additional details.