



Lake County  
Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service ®  
Amateur Radio Emergency Services ®  
1303 N. Milwaukee Avenue  
Libertyville, IL 60048



## **ILLINOIS AMATEURS SUPPORT TORNADO RELIEF, RECOVERY EFFORTS**

Illinois ARRL Section Emergency Coordinator Pat Ryan, KC6VVT, reports Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES) team members and local radio amateurs in LaSalle County--nearly 100 miles southwest of Chicago--this week supported American Red Cross relief and recovery efforts in the wake of tornados April 20 that left at least eight people dead. LaSalle, Putnam, Kankakee and Will counties were designated as disaster areas. Especially hard hit was the LaSalle County town of Utica, where the downtown area was devastated.

"There was an outstanding turnout by local and nearby hams," Ryan told ARRL. "Many local hams are assisting in recovery efforts and damage assessment." In addition, SKYWARN teams and severe weather spotters "helped greatly throughout the area to spread the word of the approaching tornado tracking across many counties.

LaSalle County ARES Emergency Coordinator Frank Carraro, KF9NZ, said he'd settled down to read a book when he began hearing weather-spotter reports of approaching tornados. He said it soon became obvious that Utica had been badly hit. "All the electric power was out, the roads were clogged with debris and panicked residents of the area--some trying to get in, and some trying to get out," he said.

Jim Stefkovich, KD5HLE, the meteorologist in charge at the National Weather Service (NWS) Chicago Forecast Office, expressed gratitude for Amateur Radio's assistance in providing ground-level storm reports. "This was a true team effort, and I truly appreciate everything that was done from everyone in the Amateur Radio Community," he said. "I could not be more proud of everyone's efforts."

Ryan, who lives in LaSalle County, reports that after the N9OUW Tri-County repeater was knocked off the air, owner Rich Grimshaw, N9OUW, and Kurt Clausen, KB9RKU, installed a deep-cycle battery from the Starved Rock Radio Club to get the machine back up. "This essential ham repeater then provided ideal coverage to link the downtown Utica area below the Illinois River bluff for further operation by the many amateurs responding," he noted. "It was the critical link for this area."

The reactivated repeater supported disaster recovery efforts coordinated by the Illinois Valley Red Cross chapter in Peru. Simplex nets were activated in the Utica area on 2 meters to support shelter operations and disaster assessment and to minimize battery drain at the repeater. Grundy County amateurs also turned out to assist in LaSalle County.

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LaSalle County Assistant EC Joe Tokarz, KB9EZZ, said some 30 amateurs responded in his county alone. With telephone service being restored by week's end, Amateur Radio's role was beginning to wind down, he said. He encouraged hams to take advantage of ARRL's Amateur Radio Emergency Communications on-line classes, weather-spotter classes as well as other available emergency preparedness training to be ready. In this situation, he noted, there wasn't much advance warning.

Ryan reports "outstanding assistance" from Community Emergency Response Teams throughout Northern Illinois. Twisters also hit the town of Granville in Putnam County.

Salvation Army Team Emergency Network ( <http://www.saturn.org>)

National Director Pat McPherson, WW9E, reports Salvation Army canteens have been roving stricken neighborhoods providing food, beverages and respite and assisting with damage assessment and cleanup.

"We used SKYWARN and our SATERN folks to keep us abreast of reports as the weather conditions turned sour, and they turned out to be invaluable assets in determining the course of the tornados," said McPherson, who's headquartered in Chicago.

Will County ARES Emergency Coordinator Rob Sobkoviak, K9NYO, said tornados destroyed one house and damaged dozens of other homes and businesses in Joliet. He said The Salvation Army--with SATERN support--was called in to assist with damage assessment and cleanup and to provide meals to affected residents and emergency workers. Sobkoviak also cited the efforts of the ARES Severe Weather Net and of numerous weather spotters. Will County amateurs staffed ARES stations at local emergency operations centers and at the National Weather Service in Chicago.

"These guys are true heroes," Sobkoviak said of his ARES team members.

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