

South Skyline SET Report

October 21, 2017

Objectives: SC4ARES will be crucial in establishing a communications link for disaster service organizations to maintain effective communication between Middleton Tract, La Honda, South Skyline and other areas. The goal is to establish a reliable communications link between the La Honda DOC, Saratoga-Summit DOC and Half Moon Bay EOC.

Specific South Skyline Objectives:

1. Test the viability of a ham radio communication station at the Saratoga-Summit Fire House.
2. Test intra - and inter - neighborhood GMRS radio communications in Portola Heights, Castanea Ridge, Cloud's Rest / Rocky Creek, Monkey Rock, Rosemary Lane and Saratoga-Summit.
3. Test simplex ham radio communications between Portola Heights, Castanea Ridge, Cloud's Rest / Rocky Creek and Saratoga-Summit.
4. Test use of Las Cumbres CASTLE repeater (K6FB – 145.450 (-) (100)) as Saratoga-Summit Command.
5. Determine if radio communications can be established between Saratoga-Summit and Portola Heights with San Lorenzo Valley ARES (147.120) and with Loma Prieta ARES (146.835).
6. In Portola Heights, conduct a successful mock evacuation through fire exit road from the intersection of Longridge / Portola to Skyline Blvd, via School Rd and Ward Rd.

The Scenario: Original plans for this drill / SET was to be a fire in Middleton Tract that was threatening La Honda and South Skyline neighborhoods. Originally, the drill was to involve numerous fire organizations and the activation of South Coast CERT, South Skyline CERT and San Mateo LAEG. Due to the Bear Fire in the Santa Cruz Mountains the week prior to this drill, it was decided to not involve firefighters, CERT and SMC LAEG.

Participants: South Skyline Neighborhoods --- Portola Heights, Castanea Ridge, Cloud's Rest/Rocky Creek, Monkey Rock and Rosemary Lane. Seven ham radio operators participated.

South Skyline Results:

- Objectives 1 and 4: A radio was set-up at Saratoga-Summit and an antenna was erected on the truck of KI6FAO. The CASTLE repeater was successful in communicating with La Honda DOC, Portola Heights and Castanea Ridge. However, around noon, this repeater was getting a lot of interference from a Net in Sacramento that uses the same frequency.

- Objective 2: We were able to establish inter- neighborhood GMRS communications between all South Skyline neighborhoods, with the assist of relaying from KD6UCA in Castanea Ridge and K6TPS in Portola Heights. KJ6GMG used a new, specifically GMRS freq. programmed antenna and for the first time, was able to reach Cloud's Rest and Rosemary Lane from Portola Heights. Portola Heights was also able to communicate directly with Saratoga-Summit on GMRS radio. The GMRS frequencies experienced a great deal of interference due to usage overlap with a horse event in the area. We need to continue to explore the advantages of a GMRS Repeater and / or privacy codes on the radios.
- Objective 3: Simplex on VTAC34 (146.535) worked well between Portola Heights and Castanea Ridge and Saratoga-Summit. It worked sporadically between Castanea Ridge and Cloud's Rest. Need to provide a better antenna at Cloud's Rest.
- Objective 5: Ham radio communications on the San Lorenzo Valley ARES repeater worked very well from Saratoga-Summit and Portola Heights. In the case of a real emergency, use of this repeater from Saratoga-Summit would be more effective than the CASTLE repeater. Communications with the Loma Prieta repeater from Saratoga-Summit required raising the antenna to about 20'. No communication was successful from Portola Heights to Loma Prieta.
- Objective 6: Eight Portola Heights vehicles participated in the Mock Evacuation. This route was difficult in places, but achievable with two-wheel drive. Low clearance vehicles would not have done well and in the winter, this route would be four-wheel drive only. Residents were able to test their keys on the 3 locked gates along this route. More keys are being made for residents.

From a South Skyline perspective, the SET was very successful and beneficial. Special thanks to K16FAO for setting up communications at Saratoga-Summit and to all of the GMRS and ham radio operators who participated. We continue to learn with each drill.