

FRS (Family Radio Service)

What forms of communications do we have available to us? Of those, which can we use in an emergency? Which can we use in a disaster when there is no electricity, internet, or cell phones? Good old-fashioned two-way radios. Available to civilians are the FRS and Amateur or Ham radios. Many of us that volunteer for Vista CERT have a Ham license and participate in a weekly "net". This controlled net provides us the opportunity to not only practice radio operation, but different exercises, such as message handling and relaying messages as well. Getting your license is not difficult, and we have some loaner radios available to newly licensed Vista CERT volunteers.

- FRS is a low power "line of sight" radio. They are best when used in close proximity to each other.
- They do not require an FCC license.
- Many use rechargeable batteries, but some allow the use of AA alkaline batteries as well. So it is imperative to keep them charged and have extra batteries on hand. It is recommended to keep the batteries removed from the radio when stored to prevent leakage.
- Turn on the radio.
- Note what channel and P/L the radio is set to. Make sure that other radios you will be talking to are set the same. The channel is a frequency, just as on a conventional radio. The P/L is sub-audible privacy tone which prevents others from hearing you, even on the same channel.
- Most radios have a multitude of operator choices, just as with a cell phone. The majority of those are personal preference, however, knowing how to change channels and P/L tone are critical to know.
- What is a "PTT"? It is the "Push to Talk" button. Unlike a cell phone, you need to push the button when you speak and release it to hear.
- Always talk across the microphone and not directly into it. This helps make your speech more clear. The microphone is usually a very small hole on the face of the radio.
- Always make an effort to speak slowly and enunciate your words for clarity. Remember to speak at a rate that the other person or persons can easily write what it is your saying. Minimize the use of slang, not everyone may understand it. Use plain simple English, we do not use any sort of codes for anything. Even with Ham radio, the use of "Q" codes are not to be used in emergency communications. "Q" codes were developed by Hams to use when operating with Morse Code, and it is common for them to use them in everyday casual radio conversation as well.
- Speak when necessary. Unless you have vital information to pass, keep quiet! Emergency radio traffic always has priority. In an emergency, Hams will always yield the frequency to emergency traffic.
- Often times it is necessary to spell a word. In this case, say "I spell" and use the phonetic alphabet. If you can't remember use another common word. The

