

March of Dimes Walk for Babies April 25, 2009 After action report.

A number amateur radio licensees (HAMS¹) provided public safety and other support for the annual March of Dimes “Walk for Babies” on April 25, 2009. This event took place in and around the Florida Atlantic University campus in Boca Raton Florida. We deployed a total of 13 stations, using their own radio equipment, mostly hand held radios. We also used two local repeaters and the Boca Raton Fire Rescue Service “SU-65” communication and rehabilitation van. The event started at 9:00AM and was complete by Noon local time.

This year Justin Hornby's (KI4WFJ) coordination efforts included an e-mail two days before the event reminding the hams who volunteered of the date and the start time. Justin also provided a list of participating hams, their initial assigned locations and a detailed map of the route to each of the hams participating. This hadn't been done consistently in the past and helped in assignments. The MOD organizers had sent an earlier e-mail, but “Ham radio station” wasn't one of the activities mentioned, and many of those e-mail requests for volunteers appear to have been ignored.

There was one ham assigned to each rest area (5 total), one to the “victory van”, one to the supply truck, and one to the start/finish line. Other hams were positioned along the route to maintain “line of sight” coverage of the event and a “rover” station in a car provided coverage of the route where it was visible from a street. One station provided “net control” duties, organizing the on air activity and one station worked as a liaison to the MOD coordinators. This worked quite well and we were always able to track the lead and trailing participant and the main body of the participants. There was a lot of trouble with noise caused by wind in microphones.

There were a number of equipment failures during the event. The VHF radios in the BRFRS SU-65 did not work. This appears to be a failure in the antennas or cabling, and not in the radios themselves. Net control was done from John Melcher's (N8JUC) car which has amateur radio equipment installed. We also experienced trouble with the KC4GH repeater on 147.255 MHz. This appears to be intermodulation problems manifested as “noise” and intermittent operation. The problems started around 9:30. The net control frequency was successfully changed to the Boca Raton Amateur Radio Association repeater on 145.29MHz which was used for the remainder of the event. The frequency change went quite well and shows that practicing this change and advance programming of radios is very much worthwhile.

There were a number of participants who elected not to finish the event and were picked up by the “victory van” The “victory van” was dispatched by net control to pick up these participants at the request of the hams positioned along the route. The supply truck's location was tracked and occasionally dispatched to a rest stop with extra supplies, mostly ice. One participant tried to start quite late, after the main body of participants had reached rest stop 2.

Recommendations

All hams should bring foam shrouded microphones or headsets to reduce confusion caused by wind noise. Somehow an external antenna for the victory antenna was overlooked. When BRFRS SU-65 is used in the future a backup radio and antenna should be brought by one of the ham stations volunteering for the event. In the future explore the use of the 70cm amateur band, several repeaters are available in the area and most of the ham volunteers have radios which can be used on this band.

¹ Stations licensed by the FCC in the Amateur Radio Service are often called “Ham Radio Stations”. Throughout this document specific Hams will be mentioned by their name and callsign.

Early contact by the organizers, particular the ham radio organizer certainly helped. Earlier in the month the ham volunteers for the FAU Triathalon were coordinated by the use of a Yahoo group. Justin (KI4WFJ) secured an electric golf cart which improved his mobility, a real feature for a coordinator.

Thanks

Thanks go to

The Boca Raton Fire Rescue Service for use of the KC4GH repeater and SU-65

The Boca Raton Amateur Radio Association for the use of their WB4QNX 2 meter repeater.

John Holzapfel KE4IDW for going home and bringing radios and an antenna for use in SU-65

Ron Diego W2DO for coordinating the use of SU-65

Assistant Chief Raul Travieso for delivery and pick up of SU-65

Amateur Radio Stations:

Shirley Ritchie	N4JKI	Start/Finish
Lisa Kleber	W4LIS	Rest Stop 1
Dennis Jordan	KC4HLX	Location 1a
Clem Storch	KD4CLM	Rest Stop 2
Pat Devlin	KG4LCJ	Rest Stop 3
John Holzapfel	KE4IDW	Location 3a
Justin Pagano	KJ4IDT	Rest Stop 4
Harold Marble	W8SYU	Rest Stop 5
Dan Fritz	NQ4O	Supply Truck 1
Warren Rothberg	W4WR	Rover 1
Sarah Coon	KJ4IDS	Victory Van
Justin Hornby	KI4WFJ	Coordinator
John Melcher, Jr	N8JUC	Net Control

This report prepared by John Melcher, Jr (N8JUC)