



Staff photo by Ginny Southworth

Training in the Aiken County Amateur Radio Communications trailer. (Front to back) David Ruth, emergency management director, sits with Bob Besley, Paul Matthews and Peter Zwanka, who are all ham radio operators.

Area radio operators may go help victims

By **KAREN DAILY**
Staff writer

A contingent of area amateur radio operators say they may be a part of a second phase of volunteers heading to the Gulf to assist with communications during recovery efforts.

About a half dozen amateur radio operators in Aiken have been training in their new state-of-the-art communications trailer this week.

There are several more operators in the area who are eager to learn on the new equipment.

The group has been monitoring the emergency communications in the Gulf states in a

newly purchased trailer that is fully funded by Homeland Security grant money.

"This is the first one in the U.S. dedicated to amateur radio," said Dr. James Boehner, National Association for Amateur Radio Section Manager.

The radio operators are monitoring the different nets in the affected area.

"We in emergency communications can bridge the gap between police, fire and emergency personnel," he said.

The mobile unit is equipped with several radios satellite technologies, direct TV and wireless Internet, said volunteer radio operator Bob Besley.

The diesel generator allows the trailer to run without electricity.

On Friday, the group was monitoring nets being used in the disaster area.

"If we need to we can transmit messages," Boehner said.

Most of the "chatter" in that area is concerning health and welfare.

"They are working to put that information out," Boehner said. "When all else fails there are amateur communications."

The group of volunteer operators is no stranger to emergency communications.

In the summer of 2003, the Aiken County Sheriff's office

communications center was crippled by a lightning strike to its communications tower.

"In that case they lost communications between the ambulances and the sheriff's office," Boehner said.

One amateur radio operator was assigned to each ambulance while a lone operator was at a headquarters dispatch center, he said.

Aiken County Emergency Services Coordinator David Ruth said they have not been called yet, but he believes it is likely that they will respond to the area with the trailer shortly.

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