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	<b>EMERGENCY MEASURES RADIO GROUP</b>
	<b>OTTAWA ARES</b>

Two Names - One Group - One Purpose

## **Activation - Ontario Power Outage EMRG-701**

Version: 1.1

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## 1.0 REVISION SUMMARY

<b>Date of Change</b>	<b>Revision Number</b>	<b>Summary of Changes (Section #, type of change)</b>
September 1, 2003	0.1	Creation of document based on notes.
2004-05-23	1.1	Modify numbering to EMRG-701 and add classification

## **2.0 PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT**

This document is a synopsis of response of the Emergency Measures Radio group to the Ontario Power Outage that occurred at 16:11pm EST on August 14<sup>th</sup>, 2003.

The debrief was held on August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2003 at Algonquin College, Room 106.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND TO INCIDENT**

Ontario Power Blackout was just one of many blackouts within a power grid stretching from Ohio and down to New York City. While the outage only lasted for a couple of days some cities were affected by roaming blackouts for up to week.

The incident occurred at approximately 4:11 pm in Ottawa, right during rush hour traffic with temperatures around 30 degrees centigrade. A sunny day with blue sky and no clouds.

Apart from inconveniences and snarled traffic, for most people it was just a power outage.

Like the early days of the 1998 Ice Storm, there was nothing immediately urgent about the situation, however, with increasingly warm temperatures in the days ahead and no certainty as to when the power would be coming back on, the situation could have been much worse than it was.

This incident was the first time that the EMRG Group had been activated by the City of Ottawa and fell in line with what the Emergency Measures Radio Group was about.

At around midnight of the first night, a request came from People Services to provide communication assistance at shelters which were opened to provide assistance to those who were on oxygen and had battery backups that were starting to fail.

Our role was not big but important and showed the value of having relationships with different groups.

## 4.0 CHRONOLOGICAL OVERVIEW

- 4:11 PM Power Outage Occurs
- 4:30 PM Traffic Snarls occur throughout Ottawa  
Cell Phone systems are overloaded making them unreliable.  
Temperature, somewhere around 30 degrees C.  
People starting to find out through radio how wide spread the blackout is.
- 5:15 PM Call between Peter (VE3BQP) and John (VA3JBS) to discuss the  
blackout. Decision made to place all EMRG members on standby.
- 5:20 PM Management team notified of status where people were reachable
- 5:30 PM Callout to members started by Tom (VA3WTJ) and John (VA3JBS)
- 5:45 PM VA3 OCE (EOC Radio Station) comes on air.  
People checking into VA3EOC (Manned by Ben VE3CDA)
- 6:00 PM Peter (VE3BQP) arrives at EOC on bike.
- 6:15 PM Hospital Radio at EOC determine to be non-functional. Fire Radio – VHF.
- 7:35 PM Harold (VA3UNK) dispatched to EOC to backup and relieve Ben(VE3CDA)  
Mike (VE3UMC) asked to take overnight shift at EOC
- 7:50 PM John (VA3JBS) receives call from Liz (VA3ELB).  
Radiogram received through NTS for Red Cross.
- 7:53 PM Red Cross Message delivered.
- 8:20 PM John (VA3JBS) receives call from Al at Red Cross with return message.
- 8:25 PM Message sent via Liz (VA3ELB) Back to Red Cross
- 00:00 AM City activates EMRG to provide communications at shelters.
- 00:10 AM Rick (VE3IHI) dispatched to Nepean Sportsplex for Shelter setup.
- 00:20 AM Mike Kennedy(VA3TEC) and Carolyn (VE3WIZ) dispatched to Orleans for  
Shelter setup.
- 02:00 AM Richard (VE3UNW) dispatched to relieve Mike at Orleans at 3:00
- 02:10 AM Nepean Sportsplex shuts down.
- 08:10 AM Clayton (VA3CBJ) re-opens Nepean Sportsplex

- 09:30 AM Johnny (VE3EIE) relieves Richard (VE3UNW) at Orleans.
- 10:30 AM Dave Harris relieves Mike (VE3UMC) at EOC.  
Len (VE3LPH) relieves Clayton at Nepean Sportsplex
- 16:30 PM EMRG Operations at Nepean and Orleans as well as EOC cease.

## **5.0 COMMENTS ABOUT OR FOR OTHER GROUPS**

- Very positive feedback on city officials and the people who were from the People Services group both staff and volunteers. Everyone was very helpful and easy to talk to.
- Phones in shelters no way to receive calls.
- Would have been of benefit to have the city of Ottawa main numbers or other important main numbers at the EOC desks.
- Ottawa Fire Dept needs to update Radio in the EOC.
- Security at EOC and the importance of ID Cards.



## 6.0 EMRG LEARNINGS

### Preparation

- Hard to get ready in the dark, stresses the need to be prepared.
- About being activated. Wait don't self deploy because one thinks its important.
- Battery operated phones ... don't work well when there is no electricity.
- Answering machines didn't work, makes it difficult to leave a message during activation.

### Equipment

- Cross Band Repeat – Not used enough needs to be practiced.
- Audio - Problem with the Vertex radio and headset in the EOC.
- Repeater – Tail too long, can we fix that.
- Bad signals from hams, how to deal with them
- Magmount antennas – need groundplanes.
- Had Mains AC and then Patched a Generator into the building, operated on battery for 1.5 hours. Patching generators into the building takes time.
- Long Extension cords and power bars are really important. Electrical outlets far away.
- Cash is very useful when no electricity. Bank machines don't work.

### Net Control

- Need to take control of situations such as the following:
  - Bad Signals
  - Emergencies
  - Non useful information being reported by people.
  - Check-ins and people who are monitoring.

### On air behaviour

- On air repairman, don't do it, operator has to fix it, net controller has to tell him to fix it.
- Don't volunteer information because you believe it to be important.

### Exercise Topics

- Cross Band Repeat
- Activation
- Testing of equipment at pre-deployed locations.
- Message logging.

### Operations

- Scheduling of resources ... long shifts.
- Forms for doing things such as scheduling.
- Priorities for communications.

- Need a process of signal reports ... what do the different signal reports mean, so that the person knows how to fix it.
- Standard log forms
- Standard Message forms.
- Process for dealing with emergencies.
- Situation updates fro those who are monitoring.
- Letter of understanding for workplace to give to employers.
- Preplanning for the shelters ... setup and equipment.
- Logging ... keeping track of key events.
- Phone tree ... keeping people up to date.
- Standby activation ... Standdown activation.
- KTN is running a net on MWF nights.... Just to be aware. Once the repeater is in use then it's in use.
- People call out list ... Districts allocation of EMRG members.
- Information sheets at the EOC were out of date.

**Stuff that went really well**

- Repeater was very reliable.
- Lots of people ready to help.
- Excellent radio behaviour both during check-in and after.