

The Pace Plan

Emergency Communication Planning

Have you ever heard of “P.A.C.E.” regarding communications? Most club members had not until Matthew Martinez’s(N5MHM) presentation at the Ellis County Amateur Radio Club meeting. Matthew explained each of the letters in the word “PACE” identified a specific targeted communication method that every family should establish as part of their emergency communication preparedness planning.

Emergency situations can come in various forms, hurricanes, tornadoes, winter storms, power outages just to name a few. Nothing can be more frustrating than not being able to receive information about what’s going on. We may be able to turn on the radio and listen to radio news and information, but what about contacting our loved ones? The other frustrating aspect of emergency situations is not being able to communicate with other family members. A family member may be in different parts of the local area, or another state that’s within that emergency area.

That is where “the PACE Plan” comes in. Defining your mission is the first step! An example mission statement is “contacting our loved ones.” This is our well-defined mission. You can use another example, but the information in this article is for generating a collaborative discussion when you write yours with your family.

The letter “P” represents the primary method of communication. It is the best, and intended, method of communication. In today’s electronic environment a cell phone or smart phone will normally be the primary. Almost everyone has one and uses it for everyday communications. We access the internet for everything from shopping to email and texting, to researching topics. We may rely on television or radio to receive news about events happening all over the world, but we can’t talk back through broadcast stations to communicate with loved ones. Remember our mission is “contacting our loved ones.”

The letter “A” represents the alternate communication method. It is another common, but less optimal method. Besides cellular voice, text messaging or email, what common method can be used to “contact our loved ones” during a time when the primary system is not available? A hardline telephone may do the job, especially if our loved ones can be contacted because they have one in their home, or their neighbor has one. Voice over internet protocol and copper wire are still common but less optimal methods.

The letter “C” represents the contingency communication method. This method may not be as fast, convenient, or reliable as the previous two methods, but it can accomplish the task. Remember our mission is “contacting our loved ones.” A slow, inconvenient, and a “not on our timeline or schedule” method which will still work to accomplish your mission or task requires critical thinking. Amateur radio can work if all parties have licenses, skills, and the tools needed to put them into use. If you want your mission to be successful, resourcing and using a particular radio operator, or group of operators, as a contingency should be completed before disaster strikes. You should not be trying to randomly find someone during a disaster.

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The letter “E” represents the emergency communication method. This is the communication of last resort. Emergency methods may cause delays or otherwise affect operations. This is where you really need to make positively sure your mission is developed correctly. Remember our mission is “contacting our loved ones.” If you create a method that pulls fire, EMS, or police from doing their jobs to help you in “contacting your loved ones,” you might be affecting operations. Perhaps you should consider using the Red Cross in the alternate or contingency parts of PACE planning? Give them a try but don’t ignore using any of them as the last resort. Understand what your mission is and re-evaluate as needed.

The PACE plan must have embedded triggers that each collaborative member helps to establish for the when, how, and why the alternate method is to be used, and then the contingency, and then the emergency. The only positive way to make sure your emergency communication mission will work is to train and exercise before an emergency.

The PACE plan can also be used for developing other emergency plans. Example missions are power, fuel, and medicine. Primary for power is the grid. If the grid goes down, then alternate could be solar or fuel generation, etc. Primary for fuel is going to the pump. If the pumps are down, then the alternate is whatever you plan for that is “common but less optimal,” and you critically think as needed for your mission. Your medicine’s primary source is your local pharmacy. But what if they are impacted because of the emergency? PACE planning will help you define your mission. Implementing triggers and training and they will see you through your emergency.