

THE NZ AMATEUR RADIO EMERGENCY CORPS.

(This was written in the late 1950s for publication, but there is no record as to who wrote it)

The Amateur Radio Emergency Corps was founded as a result of the Napier Earthquake when the only communications from the Napier area for several days after the disaster was from an amateur station. Amateurs as a result of this experience saw an opportunity for them to perform a useful public service. The strength of the corps today has grown to approximately 450 members in sections which are located in various centres from Whangarei to Invercargill. There are at present 20 members of the Marlborough section.

The amateur provides a unique public service by virtue of his knowledge and location throughout New Zealand which could not be provided by any other service. Each section of AREC is self-contained but it can be grouped into an area. Communication link equipment can be transferred as requirements demand. This is possible due to the recognition AREC has received from the Government in the form of grants of equipment enabling standardisation throughout the corps. Nearly all sections are equipped with the NZ made wartime transceiver ZC1. 80 in all have been made available to AREC and these have been distributed to as many sections as possible, keeping in mind the areas which have the highest emergency probably.

When the National Search and Rescue organisation was formed some five years ago, the importance of AREC was recognised, and the amateur service was included in the communications plan. In all the major searches that have been carried out since the formation of the national organisation, AREC has been responsible for the forward communications, and in many instances for communications right back to the search control room. In all cases the communications have worked perfectly, earning the commendation of those controlling the search.

The amateur service is provided on a purely voluntary basis, and much time is spent by members keeping themselves prepared for any emergency. Many sections are included in Red Cross and St Johns Ambulance organisations, and in the main cities, the Emergency Precautions Scheme (EPS) organisation has requested AREC to assist with the communications network.

At present, a new portable transceiver is under consideration for replacing the present sets used in search areas which are forward of search headquarters. The set has been designed by people who have had experience in searches, in conjunction with some of the radio engineers who are members of AREC. The set is small and lightweight, and will be produced by members of the corps in the larger centres under supervision of the radio engineers in our ranks. The sets will conform to set specifications before they are distributed to sections. 120 will be required.

AREC has been very active for some 25 years, and it has in the past found difficulty in obtaining recognition, due to the fact that it is an "amateur" organisation, but like other similar voluntary organisations such as tramping clubs, it has proved that under adverse emergency conditions, a task can be done, and done well. Official recognition has only been gained by the hard path of ability to do a job.

Members of AREC are all licensed amateur radio operators, that is, they have passed an examination in radio theory and morse code, as required by the Postmaster-General. Amateurs obtain through practise with the general activities of their hobby, a rare ability to hear and copy weak signals, together with a practical knowledge of many aspects of radio communications. This ability and experience together with the ideal of performing a service to the community ensures that AREC can always be relied upon to carry out any task required. It is justly proud of its heritage, a heritage members jealously guard.