

# Amateurs in Action

*Recounts of ham radio operators who have used their time and skills to help others in a time of need*



## Rescue in the San Gabriel Mountains

It was a quiet afternoon on 11 July 2009, and Rich Lippucci KI6RRQ (now NI6H), of Vista, California, was monitoring a local repeater from his home station. *I heard someone come over the repeater, calling, "Is anybody listening?" I responded and the caller said he was on his handheld hiking around the Mt. Baldy area. He said a few hikers had arrived from farther in the backcountry, and one of their friends had broken an ankle and was a mile or more up the trail and needed help.*



*Rich Lippucci KI6RRQ, monitoring*

The caller, Kirk Gustafson KE6MTF, said there was no cell service where they were. He had an approximate idea of where he was, but he did have GPS coordinates. Lippucci called 911 and was transferred three times.

*Dispatch coordinated the rescue with the San Bernardino Fire Department who sent a foot patrol to the area, he said. The Sheriff's office dispatched a helicopter to the hiker, who was now stabilized, but they did not feel they could land, due to the steep terrain, so they performed a tether rescue. About fifteen minutes of arriving, the chopper airlifted the 40-year-old woman out successfully.*

Kirk said, *When I got out of my car to start the hike, I grabbed my handheld radio and GPS. My friends told me "That's just extra weight – you won't need that." I told them, "I go nowhere without my radio." I don't think they will say that next time!* Kirk said that some of them decided they need to look into getting ham radio licenses too.

Lippucci said that ham radio saved the day. *This is such an excellent example of the benefits of ham radio, when cell and landlines were unavailable. If they had to hike out of the wilderness, get to their cars, and find a cell signal, they might have been pushing up against the loss of daylight hours. Any rescue would have been significantly more difficult in the dark.*



*The terrain necessitated a tether rescue*

Lippucci said that 911 and the Sheriff's office in San Bernardino accepted the ham radio call without hesitation. *They used a ham radio operator to relay questions to Kirk through me, to gain all the information they needed to put assets on the emergency, he said. It was as if I was calling about something in my own backyard, even though the problem was several counties away in the mountains, with people I didn't know. I am proud to have had the opportunity to use my license in service of an emergency situation. As a CERT member, this was the very reason I got my ham radio license in the first place!*

You can read Rich's story on [the ARRL website](#) and in *QST* October 2013, page 87.