



## **New Communications Tool at Houston TranStar Ready for 2007 Hurricane Season**

Certified amateur radio operators offer communications options during crisis

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HOUSTON (Nov. 30, 2006) – A new communication system that uses radio frequencies to send e-mails is the latest tool in the arsenal used by Houston TranStar to communicate with others during a crisis. During hurricanes and other events that leave entire communities without electricity, the new Amateur Radio e-mail system will allow emergency providers to stay in touch with others.

Picture this scenario: It's 2007, and a massive hurricane has caused power outages throughout large portions of the region, causing normal communication channels to fail. Electricity and telephone lines are down. Regional shelters have been set up throughout unincorporated Harris County, and Harris County's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management has sent volunteer Amateur ("Ham") Radio Operators to those sites.

Using a system called WINLINK 2000, radio waves are converted to e-mails, allowing amateur radio operators to stay in contact with others. The network system lets ham operators in the shelters instantly send lists of needed items to a broad range of governmental entities, including local, regional and federal resources such as FEMA and the National Guard. In past years during power outages, emergency personnel would have to drive between sites, possibly under dangerous conditions, to communicate.

"We know from working with New Orleans during the Hurricane Katrina evacuation that power outages held up critical requests for assistance and supplies," said Harris County Judge Robert A. Eckels. "WINLINK 2000 provides an alternative method of relaying information and requests, which makes Harris County and the region much safer for all of us."

Houston TranStar relies so heavily on the amateur radio volunteers and their communications network that space is provided for them in the Emergency Operations Center.

"Harris County ARES is very pleased to participate in the WINLINK 2000 messaging system, which allows us to transmit data during emergencies," said Joe Gadus, Public Information Officer for Harris County Amateur Radio Emergency Services (ARES). "Supply lists and medical needs can be accurately e-mailed, even when the Internet and standard phone-supported communication systems aren't working. This places us in a much better position for the 2007 hurricane season."

Houston TranStar is a collaboration between four government agencies that coordinate and enhance transportation and emergency management services, responding to incidents and emergencies in Harris County and beyond. Sharing their resources to serve area residents, the agencies are the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), Harris County, Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (Metro) and the City of Houston.