

The Source

ADVISORY RADIO NEWSLETTER
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Union Beach Emergency Information Radio

By Michael Harriott – Councilman & Emergency Management Coordinator, Union Beach, NJ

Union Beach's Emergency Advisory Radio Station has been in operation 8 years now. Here's the story of how councilman/coordinator Mike Harriott established the station and how he has managed it over time.



UNION BEACH EMERGENCY
INFORMATION STATION
1610 AM RADIO
UNION BEACH EMERGENCY
MANAGEMENT

Emergency coordinator Mike Harriott knew Union Beach would need a way to promote the new station. His solution: switch-activated flashing beacon signs.

Harriott also sent to every home in Union Beach refrigerator magnets to tout the station (see above).

"In 1995, whenever we had an emergency in town, as emergency management coordinator for the borough of Union Beach, I would have to request assistance from our fire department and first aid, along with OEM personnel. Our departments had to go out in all types of inclement weather and use their PA system to alert our residents of possible evacuations and instructions. This system was not very efficient, because the public was unable to understand the message. I then found out about an emergency advisory radio station being installed in another town and thought this could be the answer to our problems. So I presented the idea to my Local Emergency Planning Council (LEPC). My LEPC is made up of representatives from fire, first aid, police, school, OEM residents and industry. They agreed that an emergency advisory radio system could offer clearer communication and free personnel from having to go out during inclement weather.

"A local industry member of the LEPC, International Flavors and Fragrances (IFF), at a subsequent meeting, indicated that they too needed a method of alerting the public should an incident happen at their facility and offered to match any donations we received for the station – dollar for dollar. So, we sent letters to local businesses and residents to raise half the required money to establish Union Beach's emergency advisory radio station. Four months later IFF donated the balance of the necessary money, and we purchased our system that same year (1995).

"It took us one weekend to get the system up and running. We installed the antenna on the roof of police headquarters. Station electronics were installed in our Emergency Operation Center (EOC), located upstairs from police headquarters.

"The system ran flawlessly for about five years, until the police department installed new jail-cell monitors. During that installation, wires were modified, and we started to experience a problem: the dispatcher would hear our message through the monitor of the jail cell. To resolve this, I called Information Station Specialists, the company we purchased this system from, and explained the problem. They were very helpful and suggested we purchase filters for these monitors, which we did. The problem

resolved.

"We later moved the system to our public works building, because we could get better coverage from there. Union Beach's emergency advisory radio station now covers three municipalities, to whom we have offered use of the system.

"In 2002, Sandy Hook National Park asked if they could play a message on our system to alert the motorist of park closures. This is because Union Beach is more northbound than Sandy Hook and could alert motorists before traffic jams occur. We gave the Park permission to use one channel and two minutes of talk time and reserved the right to override any message during an emergency. When we purchased the system we originally bought it with only three minutes of talk time. Eventually we realized we needed more time, so we sent our system back [to ISS] to be upgraded to five minutes of time.

"We wondered if our public would tune to our station for emergency information. During a northeast storm that gave Union Beach major flooding, the telephone at police headquarters rang continuously. Captain Kelly came upstairs to our EOC and asked if we could put a message on the radio station to ask the public not to call headquarters, unless it was an emergency. About three minutes after the message went on the air, the police phone became silent. At this point we knew that the public was listening. In addition, we used this station during a major snowstorm that brought down electrical wires. We asked the public to keep all children in during this storm for safety reasons. Many people thanked us afterward for being concerned for their families. We now play messages on a day-to-day operation. These messages advise the public how to prepare for the upcoming seasonal problems.

"When we first got our system we needed a way to let the public know about our radio station. Captain Michael Kelly of our police department called me and said he had applied for a \$2,000 grant being offered by Boat US to help emergency management get big signs with flashing yellow lights, so the public would be aware to tune to the system for information. After we received the grant, five 4x6-foot signs with flashing lights were installed at zero cost to Union Beach.

"After we installed the signs, to tout the station, we ordered refrigerator magnets the same shape and color as the signs with the same message and sent one to every home in Union Beach. This was the first expense the EOC had for the system.

"Our radio station was used during the September 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center to broadcast informational messages to the public. We tried to keep them calm and informed of any activity going on. We needed to alert them of the heightened state of emergency.

"Our radio operates on 1610 AM under call sign WPIJ669. The station is owned and operated by Union Beach Emergency Management. Our system is currently working off the roof of our public works building with no interference. Next door to the public works building is the main office for Jersey Central Power and Light. They also get no interference from the station.

"In conclusion, I suggest purchasing this station to every municipality because of the ease it offer to alert the public of emergencies. It is a way to provide up-to-date, real-time information. The whole experience of working with ISS was and still is superb. They answer any questions I have; and the technical support is extremely efficient. I am not a salesman for ISS but have definitely sent them many towns looking for a system like ours. It is nice to know they stand behind and support any problems no matter how old your system is.

"The station has helped our emergency department enhance community communications, and it provides a better working environment for all our emergency departments. Residents now tune in and listen to our messages from their homes or vehicles."

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