



R. E. A. C. T. Radio Emergency Associated Communications Teams

Updated – January 2009



Lake County REACT actually began as a CB Club back in 1976. The members, over forty in number, provided Madison and Lake County primarily with four services; namely, 1) weather watch, 2) support for Law Enforcement with neighborhood patrol during Halloween evening and traffic control for the 4th of July fireworks celebration, 3) assist charitable organizations by providing traffic safety during their walk-athons, bike-athons, Community and High School triathlons, and 4) provide help to Civil Defense and Emergency Management in expanded disaster planning.

In 1976, some members took it upon themselves to drop out of the CB Club, form another group, collect yearly dues, and become affiliated with REACT International. Fifteen club members joined REACT at that time. Of this group, five of the original members worked for East River Power Electric; which is an Electric Cooperative that provides electric service to Eastern South Dakota. East River donated 14 out-styled, but still usable, mobile radios for REACT to have and use as their own. REACT acquired a repeater and the use of a tower 5 miles South of Madison enabling members to transmit on a radio frequency different from all others in our area thus making emergency radio communications much easier.

In 1989, REACT decided that they would update their radios by organizing a fund-raiser. This proved to be very successful as they raised over \$10,000 to purchase new radios and equipment. Those radios were once again updated in 1997 through monies received from the United Way, the City of Madison, and the Lake County Commission. Those funds, along with a Federal Grant, which we applied for and received, have provided us with the very best communications, second to none, in the immediate area.

Funding for radios, supplies, and equipment has never presented REACT with a serious problem. We no longer do fund raisers. Our monies come from the United Way, memorials, private donations from individuals and Service Organizations, Church affiliated groups, fund-raisers from the schools, and a yearly amount from the Lake County Commission to be used for our annual dues, insurance, and help with other needed supplies.

Inventoried supplies for each REACT member include: two radios, one hand held and one mobile unit, batteries and a battery charger, hand-held mikes, personalized REACT fluorescent vests for night time activities, flashlights, radio cases and belt clips, cyallume candles for marking emergency areas, outside magnetic antennas, flashing emergency lights, and other incidental materials such as: notebooks, caps, rain gear, patches and decals. In November of 2001, members elected to purchase jackets with their own weather watch logos imprinted on the backs and their name and unit number on the fronts.

It is my firm belief that the success REACT has had all these many years in Lake County can be attributed to the excellent PR which we have maintained within our community. Annual visits to the schools in Madison and in neighboring communities talking to the children about weather awareness has paid big dividends for us. Visits to the nursing homes, hospitals, Service Organizations, 4-H and FFA camps, Boy/Girl Scout and SOFY (Save Our Farm Youth) groups, and holiday campers in the State Parks explaining weather safety procedures are some of the many annual activities for us. Occasionally, REACT's services will be requested to assist State, County, and Local Law Enforcement in emergency traffic control situations. REACT has provided air to ground communications to law enforcement while looking for escaped prisoners and missing persons and we were called in to provide ship to shore communications while in search of drowning victims in our local lakes.

Certainly our help evacuating the residents from the Bethel Nursing Home and aiding the American Red Cross in caring for these people during our "flood of 93" made our presence more noticeable. It didn't hurt either that for the next 4 or 5 days members of REACT were running about the community pumping out basements for those hit hardest by the flooding. All these activities plus maintaining a vigil on a rising Lake Herman about to overflow its banks and pour into Madison, or, keeping an eye on homes destroyed by fire until morning light have made people in our community aware of REACT's existence. While we have been actively involved in all the community activities mentioned, our number one priority is and always will be severe weather watch.

All too often, while visiting the schools, nursing homes, Assistant Living Quarters, or talking to people in general, we have been asked the same question repeatedly; namely, "Why do you belong to REACT and do you ever get scared when chasing storms?" Our answer is always the same. First, we tell them that many people in our community have scanners in their homes and are listening to the REACT frequency, or they will be listening to our local radio station and getting a first hand report from a REACT member who is monitoring calls from the field and putting them out on the air for everyone's benefit. Then we will say, "and yes, there have been times when we become a bit uneasy, especially late at night when everything is black and it is hard to see all the hidden dangers out there". "It is during those times that we have wished that we were someplace else other than in the middle of a severe thunderstorm unable to see anything!" Then we will tell them, "we belong to REACT because people in our community expect and depend on us to be out there for them." When the day comes that no one cares one way or the other whether or not we are out there for them, then that will be the day when we will stay at home and look out of our windows.

REACT currently has 18 active members. They receive no reimbursement for any travel expenses or damage to their vehicles. Gasoline, oil, wear and tear on their vehicle, including hail or wind damage to vehicles including lost windshields, is all part of sacrifice one makes when they become a REACT member. REACT members are asked to keep a log of their mileage and the amount of time they spend performing these volunteer services for the community. Records have been kept from 1997 up to December 31, 2008. During this time frame, REACT members have traveled 32,732 miles, all in Lake County, (it is 24,904 miles around the earth at the equator) and have logged 3790 hours providing volunteer services to the people in Madison and the neighboring communities. 3790 hours of volunteer service equates to 160 - 24-hour days; or better still, 474 - 8 hour working days.

While members of REACT have many diversified talents and are capable of performing numerous activities within a community, they are not capable of participating or partaking in everything. REACT members have identified those activities in which they have both an interest and a reasonable amount of expectation of ability and then have worked and taken special training in those areas to be the best they can. REACT does not have the resources, either human or financial, to be all things to all people. This isn't to say; that in natural disasters or other emergency situations, REACT members shouldn't do whatever they can to help. REACT, no matter how well trained, motivated, and prepared must be realistic about what an all volunteer group can accomplish. Even huge organizations such as FEMA, the Red Cross, and the Salvation Army, well funded and staffed, don't try to be all things to all people. Neither should REACT...

The past last few years, the City of Madison has hosted a National Night Out sponsored by the Madison Police Department and support by other emergency responders and law enforcement agencies within Lake County. It is during this special time that they honor the many first responders and heroes of our Community. REACT is one of many groups honored during this event. With this kind of recognition and continued support from our Community, it is easy to understand why belonging to REACT is so important and fulfilling to all our members.

Submitted by
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Lake County REACT