

Operating in an EOC, Emergency Shelter, or Other Noisy Environment 2/17/2011

One thing that is often overlooked when we build our Go Kits is what environment we will be operating in. At home we have our isolated “shack” where we control what makes noise, and what does not. When Operating in an Emergency Operations Center, Emergency Shelter, or any other noisy environment, there are things we can do to make life easier on ourselves, and those around us.

In an EOC, we may be asked to set up our Ham Radio station to support a portion of the emergency efforts in a very busy room. In the EOC you will find it will be noisy, people will be walking in and out of the room, several conversations will be going on simultaneously, other radios blaring away, and such. In a shelter, there may be many people seeking shelter and normal conversation levels will bring the background noise to disruptive levels.

On the other side of the coin, we will find ourselves turning up the volume on our radios to hear what is being sent, and our speaker output will only further contribute to the cacophony. How do we mitigate this noisy situation?

One great addition to our Go Kit is a set of good quality headphones. They will greatly reduce the interference from outside noise sources, and keep your speaker from adding to the ambient noise. Taking this one step further would be to buy one of the high quality Active Noise Reduction headsets. An Active Noise Reduction, or ANR, has electronics built in with microphones that listen to the external noise, and generate an equal, but opposite canceling signal in the ear pieces. They can literally cancel out a substantial amount of unwanted background noise, and if you’ve ever had a chance to use a set of these, it can be quite remarkable how effective they are.

There are quite a few manufacturers of ANR headsets. Some are geared towards aviation to cancel out engine and propeller noise, some are made specifically for Ham Radio such as the ones sold by Heil, and there are others that are made simply for noise reduction in the workplace. Naturally these cost more than a basic set of headphones, but once you try a set, you may never want to go back to conventional headphones. They also work great on regular day-to-day Ham Radio operating.

Either way, headphones can be a simple, yet very effective addition to any Go Kit. The information transmitted can be kept private, and the accuracy will be maintained due to your ability to better copy what has been sent.

Don’t forget to pack the proper audio adapters to connect your headphones to your radio. Some rigs use ¼ phone jacks, some 1/8th inch plugs. If you go the extra to buy a set of ANR headphones, don’t forget a spare set of batteries to keep the ANR portion alive. The best way to see if your kit is complete is to set it up and try it out.

Happy Listening!