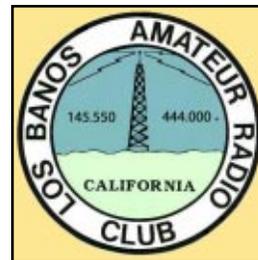




Los Banos Amateur Radio Club



The Frequency

In Katrina's Wake, Ham Radio Triumphs

By David Maliniak, AD2A

A few months ago, NBC's Tonight Show staged a race between a pair of ham-radio operators with Morse-code keys and a couple of kids with text-messaging cellphones to see who could communicate faster. The hams won hands down, proving, in the minds of some, that old technology could hold its own against new. In recent days, ham radio was put to the test again by Hurricane Katrina. This time, however, lives were at stake.

In the world of design engineers and electronics in general, change is essential. Designers work diligently to make the fruits of their labors obsolete almost before they see daylight. The turnover in technology is sometimes like a flood, with old being washed away by new over and over. Often, the new beats the heck out of the old. But there are times when old isn't necessarily bad; in fact, sometimes old works when new doesn't. And then we're glad that old is still around, or at least we should be.

Wireless technology, while relatively new to many consumers, is of course not new at all. A few (very) old-timers remember the original "wireless" of radio. The revolution wrought by the pioneers of wireless changed the world then, and the technology behind that revolution has been re-invented and re-applied time and again. Its pre-eminent incarnation today is our

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The LBARC Net

Day: Thursday
Time: 7 PM, local time
Freq: 146.925- (PL123.0)
444.000+ (PL123.0)

Scheduled hosts:

Oct - (OPEN)
Nov - W6YD
Dec - (OPEN)

Coming Events

Oct 8.....Club Meeting
Oct 14-16.....Pacificon
Nov 12.....Club Meeting
Dec 10.....Club Meeting
Jan 14th.....Club Meeting

Pacificon 2005

Pacificon, the annual Pacific Division Convention will be held in San Ramon, CA on October 14, 15 & 16. Complete details, as well as info for advance ticket purchase can be found at pacificon.org.

October 2005 Meeting

The October Meeting of the Los Banos Amateur Club will be held on October 8th in the Police Annex located at 525 "J" Street. Stay tuned for more accurate information.

Membership in the Los Banos Amateur Radio Club is open to all radio amateurs. Annual dues are \$10 and are due the first of each year.

The Frequency is published monthly by the Los Banos Amateur Radio Club and is sent to all club members. Short contributed articles are encouraged and should be sent to the editor, George Allan, W6YD at 719 Ruddy Ct, Los Banos, CA 93635 or via e-mail to w6yd@aol.com. Unless otherwise noted, the Los Banos Amateur Radio Club grants permission to reprint any article from this publication -- provided credit is given to both *The Frequency* and the article's author.

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near-ubiquitous wireless communications infrastructure, which has freed us from the shackles of landlines and made our mobile lifestyles possible. Technology truly is great stuff.

Until, of course, a monster hurricane comes along to render it nearly useless. Here we see a scenario in which a flood literally swept away the new. As Hurricane Katrina's fury hammered the Gulf states on August 29, the communications infrastructure took a devastating hit. Telephone service, including wireless, became at first intermittent and then unusable in many localities. Where there was phone service, 911 switchboards were often unreachable due to the massive volume of calls. The response of local authorities, now termed "confused" by deposed FEMA chief Michael Brown, wasn't helping much. The Gulf Coast was about to descend into darkness, chaos, and, worst of all for many, silence.

But proponents of the old were at the ready. The "old," in this case, is ham radio. In the eyes of the "man on the street," ham radio has a pretty stodgy reputation. Aren't hams still using Morse code? Don't some of them use radios with tubes, for goodness sake? What the "man in the street" probably doesn't know is that it was amateurs who advanced the radio arts early in the 20th century. Down through the decades, amateurs have embraced (and often driven) all of the innovations in wireless technology, up to and including all digital modes and the Internet. But many have stayed in touch with their roots, which is good old-fashioned analog HF operation. And while amateurs have a longstanding tradition as innovators and experimenters, they also have a mandate that comes with their licenses: to be ready, willing, and able to provide emergency communications whenever and wherever they're needed.

As Katrina bore down on the Gulf region, amateur radio operators, under the aegis of the American Radio Relay League's (ARRL's) Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES), prepared to swing into action with emergency networks that would run health-and-welfare traffic into and out of the disaster zone. As early as the Monday following the storm, hams throughout the hurricane zone were putting emergency stations on the air. In one instance, hams were instrumental in the rescue of 15 people clinging for life to a New

Orleans rooftop. Meanwhile, in Alabama, amateur SKYWARN weather nets kept the National Weather Service apprised of conditions throughout the state. In hard-hit sections of Mississippi, hams running off generators and with makeshift antennas were the only means of communication, getting word to out-of-state friends and relatives concerning their loved ones.

There were numerous other instances of hams helping those who were not simply inconvenienced by the storm, but whose lives were in imminent danger. Now that things have calmed down in the Gulf region, many of the emergency nets have stood down. But hams continue to serve the public in the many areas that are still without power or phone service.

As our nation collects itself in the aftermath of the Katrina disaster, President Bush has promised federal reviews of what went right and what went wrong. One of the findings of those inquiries should be that the federally-instituted Amateur Radio Service, which functions under the licensing authority of the FCC, stood tall when the country needed it.

Amateur radio currently faces various threats to its existence. Chief among those is the advent of broadband-over-powerline (BPL) technology, which, if broadly adopted, has the potential to cause widespread interference to HF communications, not just for amateurs but for other services that use the HF spectrum.

Amateurs and the ARRL have made a lot of noise about BPL, asserting that it could seriously hamper their efforts and those of relief agencies such as the Red Cross and Salvation Army, in the event of a disaster such as Katrina. It's rumored, though, that the same FCC commissioners who have given their blessing to BPL field trials will now take a much harder look at the technical issues concerning BPL and its interference potential in the HF spectrum. Let's face it: The federal government didn't handle the emergency in the Gulf very well; it'd be prudent for it not to sanction a technology that could impede one of the few things that actually worked.

Many readers of this newsletter are amateur radio enthusiasts. If you are, and if you haven't already done so, consider writing your congressman to express your concern about the future of the Amateur Radio Service, especially in light of its outstanding efforts in re-

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Amateur Radio Antenna “CC&R Bill” Reintroduced in Congress

New York Congressman Steve Israel has reintroduced legislation that could make it easier for radio amateurs living in communities with deed covenants, conditions and restrictions (CC&Rs) to erect suitable antennas. Arkansas Congressman Mike Ross, WD5DVR, signed aboard as an original cosponsor of the “Amateur Radio Emergency Communications Consistency Act” (HR 3876).

ARRL President Jim Haynie, W5JBP, has encouraged League members to write their elected representative and ask that they cosponsor and support the bill, especially given two hurricane emergencies in short order.

“Amateur Radio is certainly a part of this nation’s communications infrastructure,” Haynie said. “What we’re asking for is just a fair shake so we can put up antennas and help our fellow citizens.”

While the League has ramped up its efforts to educate members of Congress about Amateur Radio, Haynie said lawmakers respond best to individual members.

The one-sentence measure is identical to the text of the CC&R bill that has been introduced in the last two sessions of Congress. It would put private land-use regulations, such as homeowners’ association rules, on the same legal plane as state or local zoning regulations under the FCC’s PRB-1 limited federal preemption. PRB-1 now applies only to states and municipalities.

HR 3876 has been assigned to the House Energy and Commerce Committee. Information about the bill and a sample letter that you can use when contacting your representative are available on the ARRL Web site, www.arrl.org/govrelations/hr3876/.

In his public announcement September 19, Israel said that “often unsung” Amateur Radio volunteers were instrumental in helping residents in the hardest hit areas in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, including saving stranded

flood victims in Louisiana and Mississippi.

“State and local governments, as well as disaster relief agencies, could not possibly afford to replace the services that radio amateurs dependably provide for free,” said a statement from Israel’s office. “However, the hundreds of thousands of Amateur Radio licensees face burdensome regulations that make it extremely difficult to provide their public services.”

The above text is from ARRL Bulletin 23 dated September 26, 2005. I would encourage everyone to get involved in supporting this bill. -Ed.

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cent days. Remind your elected representatives that a vibrant and unimpeded Amateur service can and will be a lifesaver when disaster strikes. Also, consider how you yourself might help. What if a hurricane, tornado, or earthquake ravages your area? Are you prepared to get on the air without relying on the mains to handle emergency traffic? Get in touch with your local amateur-radio club and find out how you can pitch in.

Your cell phones and wireless routers are indeed great stuff, but so is a good old HF transceiver. We shouldn’t always be in such a hurry to let the flood of new technology wash away the old. The geek down the block with all the antennas on his property could turn out to be your best friend someday. Because sometimes, old trumps new.

This article originally appeared September 19, 2005 in Electronic Design Magazine. The original article and feedback about it can be seen at:

<http://www.elecdesign.com/Articles/Index.cfm?AD=1&AD=1&ArticleID=11136>

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WWW.PACIFICON.ORG

Be there or be square!