

It's Severe Weather Season Again

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It's April and we have begun the climb to the peak of severe weather season in central Illinois (May).

Champaign County Amateur Radio Emergency Service® (ARES) assists the Champaign County Emergency Management Agency (EMA) with storm spotting duties in the county. Most of the 39 registered ARES members in Champaign County are trained storm spotters. They have taken the National Weather Service training offered each spring, and in addition have participated in additional training offered by CCARES. (We are fortunate to have four meteorologists on the ARES roster). Weather nets are operated in the 444.100 repeater. The severe weather nets are operated out of the Champaign County EOC and we work closely with EMA during these events.

You may have listened in on the nets in the past. There have been some changes instituted the severe weather net procedures this year which we would like to make everyone familiar with.

The severe weather nets are directed nets. A new procedure being introduced this year is a Weather Resource/Information Net. This net will open on 444.100 when there is a good potential for severe weather, or when a Tornado Watch has been issued. The purpose of this net is to provide information on the current weather situation and solicit check-ins from our storm spotters. The NCS will provide an update and solicit check-ins periodically (every 30-60 minutes, depending on the situation). At all other times the repeater will be available for normal use. While this is a new procedure, we have been informally doing this the past couple of years.

When it is determined that spotters should be activated, a Severe Weather Net will open on 444.100. *This is a directed net, and intended only for traffic directing spotters and taking weather reports from spotters.* At the same time the Severe Weather Net is opened, the Resource/Information Net will move to the 147.060 repeater. The Resource NCS will monitor the Severe Weather Net and handle traffic not specifically related to the operation of the Severe Weather Net. For example, if someone has a question about what is going on, where the severe weather is, etc., they should take their question to 147.060. Anyone breaking into 444.100 with this type of traffic will be directed to this net. In addition, if you are not a trained ARES spotter and have something to report such as storm damage, hail, high winds, etc. you should also utilize 147.060. The information will get relayed to the EOC.

If you need to report something, the proper procedure is to drop in your call sign. We have had cases in the past where someone has asked a question or made a statement with no identification. More often than not those calls are not going to be acknowledged. When things are hot and heavy, it is hard enough to keep track of everything.

If you have something to report, (hail, damage, etc.) please do report it on 147.060. Hail reports are valuable, but only if you tell us what size it is (use coins as a comparison). Wind speeds are extremely hard to estimate, even for someone trained. Report damage instead (if there is any). Don't speculate about anything – just report what you observe. We don't need to know if it's raining or how hard (we have radar), and we don't need to know the sky is getting dark or brightening up.

We are grateful for everyone's cooperation with the Severe Weather Nets this year and in the past couple of years. Please don't hesitate to contact me by phone or at n9xdc@arrl.net if you have any questions about the severe weather nets, becoming a storm spotter, or becoming a part of ARES.

2 Meter FM Challenge

Started several years ago by Sean, KX9X, the 2 Meter FM Challenge appeared once again! It is sponsored by the K9CU Contest group of the Twin City Amateur Radio Club.

On Sunday, March 19, from 8 to 9 p.m., the 2 meter band was jumping with activity around Champaign-Urbana. The plan was to make as many contacts as possible with different stations and different locations. Each town multiplied the number of total contacts made. 3 stations operated as Rover, which was for them to travel during the contest. They picked routes to take them to the most number of different towns. The stopped long enough to make contacts, then moved on to a new town. Some of the Rovers covered 10 to 12 locations during the hour. Around 20 operators participated in the contest. This includes some in Northern Illinois as well as Decatur and other surrounding towns. The Rovers were W9SZ, Zack, KF9Z, Darren with K9BF, Ben driving, and K9XE, Ray. Contacting the Rovers made the contest most interesting. Logs were to be submitted to W9SZ no later than 11:59 p.m. on April 3, now extended to April 7.

The contest lived up to the name of Challenge because many stations congregated on only a few frequencies. There were 2 portions of the 2 Meter Band available, but almost no signals occupied the upper portion. Some of the commonly used simplex frequencies were the most popular, even though we could move anywhere in the simplex portion of the band. 146.52 and 146.49 seemed to be the most active. Other frequencies were used, but had the activity spread in the rest of the band, contacts would have been easier. Pat, N9GOC, not wishing to participate directly, opened his station to KC9DUU, Mark, and his son Adam. Mark, a recent member of TCARC, does not have an outside antenna yet. Mark and Adam worked as a team with Adam logging. It appears that they have one of the highest scores in the contest. It was a good contest and lots of fun. Zack will process the logs and announce the scores soon. We look forward to the next 2 Meter Challenge!

Hamfests

Get ready for the outdoor hamfest season! April starts the season in our part of the country. April 22 finds one in the Madison, Wisconsin area. That one is mostly inside at a fairgrounds just south of Madison. The following weekend, on April 30, is the one at Arthur, Illinois. It is mostly outside, with a few tables under cover. We hope this year will be a little warmer than last year when it was cold and very windy. Due to the cold, the day was short for many vendors. And those just visiting made only a quick trip around the flea market. This hamfest is always popular with our club members because it is close to home. On May 7, there is a hamfest at the fairgrounds in Sandwich, Illinois. That's up near DeKalb. In the past, this was a conflict with the Decatur hamfest, but Decatur has changed the date to October 21, so there is no conflict now.

The Springfield, Illinois hamfest apparently will no longer exist. Attendance has been declining, and the Princeton, Illinois hamfest added Saturday to the schedule, so it appears that there is no hamfest in Springfield now. It was held at the state fairgrounds.

The Dayton Hamvention is rapidly approaching. May 19-21 is the weekend of the 3-day event. This is always a "don't miss" event. This is the largest ham radio gathering in the USA, with around 20,000 attending. Almost every manufacturer of amateur radio products has a booth there, along with 2500 outdoor vendor spaces at the Hara Arena. The common statement about the Hamvention is that, if you can't find it at Dayton, it doesn't exist. Friday and Saturday are both good days to attend, with Sunday being less popular with many outside vendors on the way home already. However, Sunday is a great time to visit the inside booths with the crowd being much diminished. Many door prizes are given all weekend. The grand prize drawing is Sunday, where the top prize is usually worth \$5000 to \$10000. Outside vendors have not received packets yet, but the mailing started April 1. Look for yours soon. Plan now to attend this great event!