

Ham radio serves a purpose in Tama County

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By Allison Graham - The News-Herald (agraham@tamatoledonews.com) , Toledo Chronicle, Tama News-Herald

It's no secret that we live in an age of technology. Our cell phones have nearly become an appendage of our bodies. We use these devices in all sorts of ways such as tracking our exercise, giving us directions, checking our Facebook, and making the humble phone call. We have watches that can tell us how many steps we take while monitoring our heart rate. Once home from a long day of work many Americans unwind with their favorite show in front of flat screen TVs.

But what would happen if all that communication failed? Say there was a black out, a natural disaster or worse. How would we communicate with one another? How would we report emergencies?

Ham Radio, that's how.

Article Photos



Ham radio operators from a six county area gathered at Otter Creek Lake northeast of Toledo on Saturday, June 27, for a field day where they made contact with other operators throughout the world.
News-Herald/Allison Graham

According to the International Telecommunication Union, Amateur radio also called "ham" radio is the use of designated radio frequency spectra for purposes of private recreation, non-commercial exchange of messages, wireless experimentation, self-training, and emergency communication.

Every year, ham radio technicians and enthusiasts gather for what is called "Field Day." Field Days are held all throughout the world. It's a day where participants can come together, talk to people from all over the world while testing equipment to make sure things are running properly. It's fun and also an educational experience. This year technicians from Tama, Grundy, Franklin, Hardin, Marshall and Bremer counties gathered at Otter Creek, Northeast of Toledo for a 24-hour Field Day.

Among the attendees were Tom and Vicki Bickett. Tom is the Grundy County emergency coordinator and after 45 years of marriage to Tom, Vicki just recently became a technician.

Tim Englad, president of the Iowa Wireless Amateur Radio Network (IWARN) talked about Field Day being an important learning experience for the participants. "We operate and stuff happens so we look at Plan B," said Englad, "It's a learning thing for all of us."

One reason H.A.M. radio is so impressive is because the radios run solely on back up generators, solar power or batteries. Ham radio operators are able to be very inventive with the materials they use to create antennas. Some materials used at field day included parachute rope and tape measurers. "We are able to use radios with very limited power and resources," said Englad.

Some may wonder how Ham radio differs from C.B. radio. One of the biggest differences is the protocol followed. Ham radio operators do not use 10 codes to communicate. In fact while it is not a hard rule it is frowned upon because 10 codes can have different meanings to different agencies. Using plain English to communicate is important because you want the person at the other end of the radio to be able to understand exactly what you are saying especially during times of emergencies.

So while a majority of the time Ham radio is a hobby, it's the infrequent emergency situation that Ham radio can be crucial. Since Amateur Radio is used for occasions of emergency several technicians are also storm spotters. Many are sky warn certified and are able to communicate with the weather bureau to provide on the ground information during natural disasters. It is important to note that hams do not self-employ; they work with and wait to be activated by emergency services.

The local Amateur Radio Relay League (ARRL) has provided communications for several events across the State of Iowa including RAGBRAII, Tour De Scout a biking event from LaPorte to Gilbertville, H.A.M. Radio was used two years ago when major flooding hit Cedar Rapids. Most recently they provided communication for the Gentlemen of the Road Stopover Festival held in Waverly, Iowa that brought in 20,000 festival goers for the band Mumford and Sons.

- See more at: <http://www.tamatoledonews.com/page/content.detail/id/550006/Ham-radio-serves-a-purpose-in-Tama-County.html?nav=5006#sthash.qR1Nfw5J.dpuf>

Article Photos



Several different antennas were set up for the 2015 Field Day on Saturday, June 27th.



Tim England (left), president of IWARN and Tom Bicket, Grundy County emergency coordinator for Amateur Radio Emergency Services were on hand on Saturday, June 27 for an ARRL Field Day 2015. News Herald Photo/Allison Graham