

President's Corner

June 2008

As I write to you this month, the heat is stifling (it feels like August!). It's the kind of weather where the high electric demands (for air conditioning) and frequent thunderstorms can lead to power outages. And when that happens, where do people turn for communications? Traditional wire-based telephones, with their independent power systems, usually remain intact, but increasingly people are giving up their landlines in favor of mobile phones. During power outages, mobile phone customers often find it impossible to get a dial tone because of the extremely high volume of calls redirected through the cellular network. And after a couple of days on battery backup, cellular tower sites go down as well.

That's where we come in. This scenario, whereby people find themselves without telecommunications capabilities, will be increasingly common over the next few years (barring some as-yet-unimaginable and instantly affordable technological breakthroughs). And it is a situation where amateur radio is perfectly suited to come to the rescue. Are we ready to aid our local community if this scenario plays out here?

There are several ways we can prepare ourselves to assist during a communications crisis. One is to participate on the local 2 meter "StarNet" which is held each night at 6:30 pm. StarNet is currently hosted on the K2TDV repeater on 146.73 MHz (100.0 Hz PL; -600 kHz offset). If you have 2 meter reception capability and are unfamiliar with this network, it's a good idea to listen in, to get a sense of how formal message-handling is conducted on the airwaves. And if you've never participated, feel free to jump in once you feel you have the hang of it – you don't really need to communicate anything of vital importance, because it's only an exercise, so a sentence or two about how your day went is fine.

Another great way to hone your emergency communications skills is to participate in the annual Field Day exercise. The ARRL-sponsored event is presented as a contest (in order to render it more interesting to folks who might not otherwise be motivated to participate), but we at BARA are in it for the practice and the fun/comraderie, rather than the competitive aspect. We will participate this year from the W2OW shack site the weekend of June 28-29 (perhaps some setting up will take place the evening of Friday the 27th). I hope to see some of you there!

We sure don't want to experience a long-term power outage (although I enjoy the short-term variety – it's fun to watch how people interact when they're forced to walk away from their television and computer screens!), but if the worst should come, you as an amateur radio operator are situated in a unique position to possibly be a hero!

73! -allen lutins KC2KLC