Parkersburg Amateur Radio Klub

Di-Dah-Dit

Official Newsletter of the Parkersburg Radio Klub
1733 Gihon Rd. Parkersburg, WV 26101

KIDS' TURN AT THE RADIO: FIRST KIDS DAY OF 2006 IS SUNDAY, JANUARY 8

The second Sunday in January is the day to turn your shack over to the kids for some ham radio fun with a purpose. The first running of Kids Day 2006 begins Sunday, January 8, at 1800 UTC and continues until 2400 UTC with no limit on operating time (the second Kids Day will be Saturday, June 17). Kids Day provides a terrific opportunity to show youngsters what Amateur Radio is all about--and that includes its role in emergency communication. ARRL Education and Technology Program ("The Big Project") Coordinator Mark Spencer, WA8SME, says Kids Day can be a great opportunity spark change and get kids and families thinking about emergency preparedness.

"While you are coaching the youngsters who visit your shack--and their parents too--on how to make contacts and new friends via ham radio during Kids Day, why not take a few moments to ask them about their family's plans to deal with emergency challenges?" he says in December 2005 QST (see "Kids Day 2006" on p 45). "Why not use the opportunities offered by Kids Day to show the youth in your neighborhood that ham radio can be loads of fun, and that ham radio is a way that they can contribute something very valuable to their communities?"

Call "CQ Kids Day." The suggested exchange for Kids Day contacts is first name, age, location and favorite color. It's okay to work the same station more than once if the operator has changed. Suggested frequencies are 14.270-14.300, 21.380-21.400 and 28.350-28.400 MHz. Contacts via VHF repeaters are okay too, with permission from the repeater owner. Observe third-party traffic restrictions when making DX QSOs <http://www.arrl.org/FandES/field/regulations/io/3rdparty.html>.

All participants are eligible to receive a colorful certificate, which becomes the youngster's personalized "sales brochure" for ham radio, Spencer says. The League asks everyone taking part in Kids Day to complete a short survey and post comments afterward <http://www.arrl.org/FandES/ead/kids-day-survey.html>. Doing this provides access to download the certificate page, or participants can send a 9x12 self-addressed, stamped envelope to Boring Amateur Radio Club, PO Box 1357, Boring, OR 97009.

Spencer notes that this year's hurricane season highlighted one of the real values that ham radio brings to the community--a spirit of resilience. "By their very nature, ham radio operators are interested in personal preparedness and community service…this is resilience," he says. Spencer suggests that Kids Day sponsors take advantage of the opportunity to show how ham radio offers a way for participants to contribute something very valuable to their communities.

"A very effective advertising strategy is to get kids hooked on an idea," he says. "The kids in turn go home and 'bug' their parents about the idea. You plant the seed in a young mind, and they will take care of the rest!"

Spencer believes Kids Day activities can result in a family emergency plan campaign that could save lives, and future community planners who know communication and how to communicate.

"Make that personal connection that may result in a new licensee and, perhaps, more resilient individuals by opening your station and inviting kids and neighbors to share in your hobby," Spencer urges. "You just might find yourself re-infected with that enthusiasm that you once had."

Visit the ARRL Web site for full information on Kids Day <http://www.arrl.org/FandES/ead/kd-rules.html>.

RESPONSE TO BPL COMPLAINTS AN "ILLUSION" OF RESOLUTION, ARRL SAYS

In a strongly worded letter to the FCC, the League has once again asked the Commission to shut down the Manassas, Virginia, BPL system because it's still causing harmful interference to Amateur Radio and otherwise does not comply with FCC Part 15 rules. The December 19 letter from ARRL General Counsel Chris Imlay, W3KD, was in response to a November 30 letter from Spectrum Enforcement Division Chief Joseph Casey, who suggested further cooperation between the complaining radio amateurs and the city-owned BPL system. Imlay said more meetings and discussions about ongoing interference are no longer productive while "this hopelessly flawed BPL system" is allowed to continue operating.

"These meetings have not produced any solution to the interference problem but have, instead, created the illusion that the problem is being addressed," Imlay wrote. Ham radio complaints of interference from the BPL system date back to early 2004. "This system should have been taken off the air long ago, pending reconfiguration or re-engineering of it," he added, "and the only operating that it should be doing is for purposes of interference testing."

Communication Technologies (COMTek) operates the BPL system over the municipally owned electric power grid using Main.net equipment on frequencies between 4 MHz and 30 MHz. The League said the FCC has not discharged its "most fundamental obligation" to prevent or resolve interference issues involving the Manassas system, which, the League charged, only remains operating "because the Commission, for political reasons, has consistently refused to enforce its rules with respect to BPL."

The League told Casey that the only solution at this point is to order the Manassas BPL system--an unlicensed RF emitter permitted to operate only on a non-interference basis--to cease operation except to test for interference.

The Part 15 BPL rules the FCC adopted in October 2004 require a BPL operator informed of harmful interference to "investigate the reported interference and resolve confirmed harmful interference . . . within a reasonable period," Imlay pointed out. "No reasoned examination of this case could produce a finding that this rule has been complied with in Manassas," he added.

Imlay says that at a December 13 meeting, COMTek and the City of Manassas "openly acknowledged the interference to amateur stations" but claimed that until a month or so earlier, they had been unable to "notch" amateur allocations because they didn't yet have the equipment to do so. "By the admission of COMTek, the capability of reducing interference in this system does not exist," Imlay noted.

Previous meetings between the complaining radio amateurs and the BPL operator "produced no measurable results," Imlay contended, referring to the response of Donald Blasdell, W4HJL, to Casey on December 9. At one point in the system, interference was reported at S9 plus 40 dB on typical ham gear. "That level precludes virtually all Amateur Radio communications," he asserted.

Imlay took the opportunity to again point out that the Manassas BPL system is out of compliance with §15.615(a) because its operator failed to provide full information to the public BPL database by the November 19 deadline.

"ARRL again requests that the BPL facility at Manassas, Virginia, be instructed to shut down immediately," the League's letter concluded, "and that it not resume operation unless the entire facility is shown to be in full compliance with Commission rules regarding radiated emissions; with the non-interference requirement of Section 15.5 of the Commission's rules; and not in any case until thirty days subsequent to full compliance with Section 15.615(a) of the rules."

Field tests conducted by Manassas radio amateurs established that the city's BPL system "was an interference generator at distances of hundreds of feet from the modems on overhead power lines," the ARRL told the FCC October 13. "It was also, incidentally, determined that the system was susceptible to interference from nearby radio transmitters operating between 4 and 20 MHz," the League added.

Power Line Broadband Comes to Texas

Fast, alternative Internet access will offered to 2 million customers.

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John Blau, IDG News Service
Tuesday, December 20, 2005

Texans are poised to join a small but growing group of consumers and small business users worldwide who are accessing the Internet over electric power lines.

In a move aimed to increase competition among telephone and cable companies, Current Communications Group will provide broadband power line technology to the electricity distribution subsidiary of TXU, the companies said this week.

Under a ten-year deal worth around $150 million, Current will design, build, and operate a power line network for TXU Electric Delivery to provide service to more than 2 million customers in Texas.

Customers who subscribe to the service simply plug a tiny modem, based on the HomePlug power line standard, into an electrical outlet and connect a cable from their computer for Internet access, which is capable of two-way speeds 25 times faster than other high-speed services, according to the Current Web site.

In addition to traditional data services, the "triple-play" service supports Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) and digital quality video streaming, Current said.

Broadband power line technology is not entirely new, and has encountered commercial and technological difficulties over the past several years, including spectrum interference with ham-radio operators, in both North America and Europe.

International Efforts

A few years ago, Germany emerged as a hotbed of broadband power line development. Several regional electricity companies entered the power line fray, including Eon in D??sseldorf, EnBW Energie in Karlsruhe, and MVV Energie in Mannheim.

Eon later abandoned the broadband power line market, claiming the technology is too complicated and costly to deploy with little chance of seeing a return on investment any time soon.

Munich-based electronics giant Siemens AG, which had hoped to be at the forefront of this emerging technology, exited the market in 2001, citing regulatory delays and a lack of European standards.

In 1999, Nortel Networks, based in Brampton, Ontario, pulled the plug on its broadband power line activities in the U.K., claiming the technology would remain a niche product at best. Like Eon, it saw little chance of recouping the millions of dollars needed to develop reliable products and market the service.

Even if several high-profile companies have long since pulled the plug on the technology, the European Union (EU) last year decided to support it in a move to help overcome technical hurdles and lead to greater competition in the broadband market.

The EU's executive arm, the European Commission, became a key sponsor of the Open Power line communications European Research Alliance (OPERA), which is part of its "Broadband for All" program.

FCC Encouraged

In the U.S., the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has also shown support for broadband power line technology. Last year, it issued a positive report and changed rules to encourage its deployment.

Cinergy Broadband, a subsidiary of Cinergy, is meanwhile offering broadband power line services in the greater Cincinnati, Ohio, area, with plans to expand service into northern Kentucky and Indiana. Current has supplied the technology.

Thanks to IDG NEWS for this WEB News story Reprint, KA8NJW

LOST ITEMS USUALLY TURN UP EVENTUALLY ABOARD ISS, ASTRONAUT TELLS

International Space Station Expedition 12 Commander Bill McArthur, KC5ACR, told middle schoolers in Missouri and elementary schoolers in Japan that he's enjoying his stay in space. McArthur spoke November 16 with youngsters at Hermann Middle School near St Louis, and the following day with students at Takatsuki Education Center in Japan. The Amateur Radio on the International Space Station (ARISS) program arranged both direct VHF contacts. McArthur told one youngster in Missouri that lost items typically turn up sooner or later.

"I haven't lost any tools outside, but I have lost things inside the spaceship because it's so big and things float away," said McArthur, a veteran of three space walks. "So when they're lost inside, I just wait and always keep an eye out, and eventually I have found almost everything."

McArthur told both groups of students that he did not consider becoming an astronaut until he was in the US Army flying helicopters.

In Missouri, some 100 parents, teachers and fellow students were in the audience, while the rest of the school was able to monitor the proceedings between the school's KC0JYV and NA1SS via the public address system. Two St Louis TV stations also showed up for the occasion. Roy Welch, W0SL, and Mike Koenig, N0PFF, served as the control operators. MSNBC carried live video of the contact.

On November 17, McArthur told youngsters at Takatsuki Education Center that he and crewmate Valery Tokarev will remain aboard the ISS for a total of 182 days--until next April. He also said he misses his family and friends while orbiting 220 miles above Earth's surface.

"The hardest thing about living in space is not being with y our family and friends on the earth," McArthur said in answer to one youngster's question. "Fortunately, my crewmate Valery and I are very good friends, and so we keep each other company."

Eighteen questions were asked and answered during the contact between 8N3A at Hiyoshidai Elementary School and NA1SS. McArthur explained that size matters when it comes to being an astronaut. "We worry most about an astronaut being too large," said McArthur, who is 185 cm tall--just over six feet. "An astronaut cannot be any taller than I am and be on the space station, and we think maybe being a smaller person helps because then it takes less fuel to get you to space."

ARISS-Japan mentor Satoshi Yasuda, 7M3TJZ, said reporters from two TV stations and three newspapers covered the event. The control operator was Tamotsu Ando, JK3NSD. Some 300 people, including parents, visitors and news media, were on hand for the contact.

ARISS <http://www.rac.ca/ariss> is an international educational outreach, with US participation by ARRL, AMSAT and NASA.

Alabama club commended for Katrina response role:

ARRL Alabama Section Manager Greg Sarratt, W4OZK, has commended the Montgomery Amateur Radio Club for its assistance during the Hurricane Katrina relief effort. During the club's recent hamfest November 12, Sarratt presented club officials with two awards--the ARRL Public Service Commendation and the ARRL Emergency Communications Commendation. Accepting the honors on the club's behalf were MARC president Scott Pool, W4SPA, and vice president Rick Seeders, KG4PNL. "The Montgomery ARC provided superb help and public service for over a month during the Hurricane Katrina relief effort," said Sarratt, noting that the club's W4AP call sign was used for the ham station set up at the American Red Cross and ARRL marshaling center in Montgomery that handled intake for Gulf Coast-bound ham radio and Red Cross volunteers. "Over two dozen local amateurs helped in various capacities during the 37 days we were set up in Montgomery."

ARRL, FCC CONTINUE BPL INTERFERENCE RESOLUTION DATABASE DEBATE

The acting chief of the FCC Office of Engineering and Technology (OET) is standing foursquare behind the recently opened Broadband over Power Line (BPL) Interference Resolution Web site <http://www.bpldatabase.org/>. The deadline for BPL operators to populate the database, provided by the United Power Line Council (UPLC) and the United Telecom Council (UTC), was November 19. In October, the ARRL took strong exception to limitations UTC, the site's administrator, has imposed on the number of allowable licensee searches and to the use of ZIP codes as the only search key. Acting OET Chief Bruce Franca defended the BPL database November 22.

"Your concern, limiting access to the database, does not constitute a violation of the rules," said Franca, citing verse and chapter of Part 15 to back up his assertion. Franca said §15.615(d) "clearly states" that the database is intended to identify possible sources of harmful interference thought to emanate from a BPL system. "Permitting individuals who are using a licensed service that operates on the same frequencies as are used by a BPL system to query for pertinent information in the geographic area of that interference fully fulfills this function," he concluded.

A note on the BPL database site cautions that users are "allowed to search a limited number of times each month." It further advises users not to conduct random database searches, lest their access to the database be further restricted. In his initial complaint, ARRL CEO David Sumner, K1ZZ, characterized the notice as an attempt to "ration access" to the site.

Franca also defended the use of ZIP codes as the only means to query the database, saying they are easily understood and identifiable and will provide the information the rules require on BPL systems deployed within a ZIP code. Sumner had argued earlier that requiring users to enter a ZIP code before gaining access to the database was "clearly contrary" to the requirement that the database be available to the public.

Responding November 30, Sumner gamely took another stab at getting the League's point across. Part 15 is unambiguous that the information in the database must be publicly accessible approximately 30 days before a BPL system begins operation, he said. Using a ZIP code to gain entry, Sumner continued, "renders the advance notification requirement meaningless to the public" unless someone were to regularly visit the Web site and repeatedly enter a particular ZIP code. But since that practice "is specifically discouraged by the UTC's notice," Sumner pointed out, it's impossible for the public to know about a BPL startup in advance, something the BPL Report and Order seems to require.

As a result, Sumner said, the benefit of a prior notification requirement, while limited as an interference prevention measure, is lost to BPL operators as well as to licensed radio services that may suffer harmful interference that could have been avoided. Sumner said the UTC-administered database "provides less than was promised" in the FCC's October 2004 Report and Order. "For advance notification to be meaningful, the public must know when additions and changes to the database occur," he contended. "That is functionally impossible if the publicly accessible' database is actually maintained behind an opaque curtain and is only revealed one ZIP code at a time."

One workaround, Sumner suggested, would be to require UTC to make publicly available a list of ZIP codes and the date of the most recent data entry for each. "This also would make it clear when a specific BPL system serves more than one ZIP code area, information that is required by §15.615(a)(3) but that is not available to the public at present except by individual query of each ZIP code."

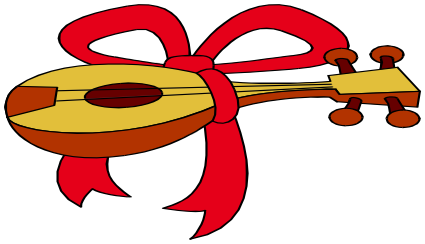
Sumner said Franca failed to respond to his point regarding the error message that appears when a database user enters a ZIP code where no BPL system apparently has been deployed. At that point, users are asked to provide "written details" about the nature of the interference and the user's licensed operations as well as location--"complete address and coordinates" --operating frequencies, whether mobile or fixed and a brief description of the interference.

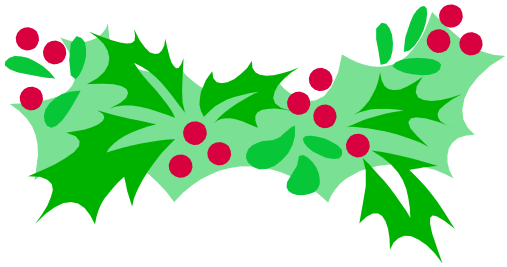
"Frankly, UTC has no authority to require the submission of such information from an FCC licensee prior to sharing information that the public is entitled to as a matter of right," Sumner concluded--reiterating a point made in his initial correspondence. "If the database were appropriately accessible the question would never arise."

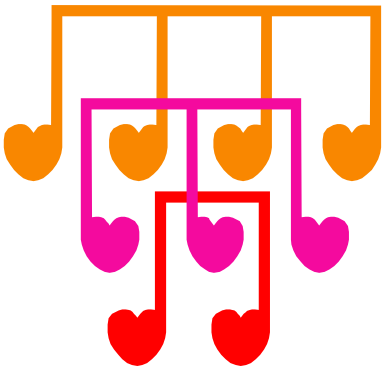
On November 23, the League told the FCC that the Manassas, Virginia, BPL system was not in compliance with FCC Part 15 rules because its operator failed to provide full information to the public BPL database by the November 19 deadline and the system should be shut down. The letter came barely six weeks after the ARRL called on the FCC to turn off the Manassas BPL system because of unresolved interference complaints to Amateur Radio.

Since the League's letter, a search under ZIP code 20110 indicates the Manassas system has provided a contact name, address, telephone number and e-mail address. Its entry still lacks details about the equipment in use, however.

The 2005 Christmas Dinner







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