



ICARC NEWSLETTER

April 30, 2024

Officers for 2024:

President – Craig Bigler, AB3XA
Vice President - Dylon Curtis KC3WMN
Treasurer - Chris Edwards, N3VFK
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1. John Kalicki KA2YOS
2. David Steiner W3CDH
3. Phil Kopczyk K3PJ
4. Cass Fitzgerald, N3FLO
5. Elmer Sorisio, KB3WG
6. Larry Freeman N3LT

LOCAL HAPPENINGS:

New antenna test event on Saturday, May 4, 2024 at the Blue Spruce park around noon. More extensive testing of antennas for the scheduled radio Fox hunt on May 11 sponsored by ICARC to help the Boy Scouts in learning about radio direction finding.

In preparation for that event some antenna builds have occurred and limited tests performed to date. There was an impromptu, realistic, field test performed on Saturday, April 27 at noon, in Blue Spruce park and some anomalies did, indeed popup. This coming Saturday (May 4) we hope to be able to do a more extensive test that will be carried out in two phases: Phase 1: Receive antenna pattern determination using the ball field or any other large unobstructed location in the park using a weak signal radio frequency source or radio Fox in an open location and visible by line of sight. Several different types of antennas will be available to test. Phase 2: a realistic field test with a weak signal radio Fox located (hidden) within the bounds of the park.

All ICARC members and friends are invited to come out and assist in this operation. Several of us will also be at the usual Saturday morning breakfast before going to the main event so, hopefully, many of you can also be at breakfast in the morning.

If you have a hand held scanner or hand held radio that operates on the 144 MHz band please bring it along with an adapter that will allow a BNC terminated antenna feed line to connect to your radio, there may be a few adapters available on site. If your scanner or ham radio will also receive in the 444 MHz band, that is a plus, because, depending upon the antenna, and a few other factors one may be able to tune to the third harmonic of the primary signal and get better results.

Radio fox hunting is lots of fun, so I hope you all can make it out come "rain or shine". (Right now there is a 50% chance of rain, near perfect weather! Hi! Hi!) In case of thunder storms the event will likely be rescheduled to the late afternoon on an appropriate weekday before May 11. We will meet in the parking lot bordering the ball field just after entering the park around **Noon on Saturday**.

Welcome New Hams!

As a result of the the ARRL VEC testing session on April 20, 2024 held at the Indiana County Emergency Management Agency, Sponsored by the Indiana County Amateur Radio Club (ICARC) we offer our hearty Congratulations to the following folks who were successful in obtaining their Amateur Radio Operators license: Mr. Deryl Mack, Mr. Bill Robinson, and Mr. Jeff Gorman. Deryl, obtained his General Class license, Bill, and Jeff both obtained their Technician Class license. Importantly, this success is rewarded by making them eligible for FREE (no dues) membership in ICARC for the remainder of the current year as well as becoming members of a, somewhat unusual, fraternity of brothers and sisters who are “strange” enough to get into ham radio.

ICARC membership cards will be available at the next meeting (May 7, 2024). Hope to see you there.

Reminder: The ICARC Public Service and Information Net will continue on Monday night starting at 8:30 PM using the W3BMD repeater on 146.91/146.31 Mhz. (ICARC is an ARRL affiliated club)

Reminder: ICARC meeting are scheduled for the FIRST Tuesday of each month: May 7, June 4, July 2, August 6, 2024 at the Indiana Eat n' Park restaurant in the backroom at 6:30 PM. Hope to see you there.

Reminder: Several ICARC members and others meet every Saturday morning for breakfast in the back room of the Indiana Eat n' Park restaurant normally starting between 8:30 and 9:00

Other Event Reminders:

Boy Scout Fox hunt on May 11, 2024: details to follow.

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

As you all may know by now, the SB 37, PA Distracted Driving Bill, passed the PA House vote on Monday, 04/29/2024 and is now on its way to the Governor's desk.

Not much to be said at this point other than the, likely, intended effect of protecting the motoring public from “idiots” who attempt to text and drive at the same time will probably never be realized. It doesn't seem easily enforceable so, I suspect it will be mainly used as “probable cause” for pulling drivers over for whatever reasons; I just hope State Hwy Troopers are rational in how they envision proper enforcement. It is not a well thought out law. Just one person's opinion.

Although, now outdated, a good impact indicator is summarized in the email below from ARRL Atlantic Division Director, Robert B Famiglio, K3RF, which was forwarded on 04/20/2024 by the ICARC Newsletter editor to all of you on the ICARC email list. (It is again reprinted here so that you won't have to search through your email folder to find it.)

This message is directed only to our ARRL Western & Eastern PA section members to alert you to a serious legal issue returning to the spotlight. A new law amending the PA Vehicle Code, pending a vote for some years, has reappeared recently and passed before the PA House of Representatives. A new distracted driving bill presents a serious problem for operating any radios which require a handheld device, whether HT or a microphone. The law has exemptions for hands free devices so cell phones are safe with such common technology as a Bluetooth earbud mike or the ubiquitous speaker phones in cars today. Since the bill was amended again in the PA house, it is going back to the PA Senate for a re-vote in about a week or so. The Senate passed the original bill some time ago.

I was involved in urging lawmakers to add an exemption for ham radio and helped add to our reasonable exemption language over 3 years ago. It survived until just before the latest vote which stripped out our exemption but left in exemptions for commercial drivers including truck drivers, bus drivers and public transportation. Also, emergency vehicle operators may continue to use a radio or phone while driving only if actually being used by an emergency responder and only while in an emergency vehicle. And before some of you ask as you have, this does not describe any ham. Any other non-exempt two-way radio user is prohibited from holding a microphone or HT while driving or even stopped at a light or stop sign. You must pull over to use your radio. Reporting an actual emergency with our radios is exempt as is use of a handheld phone while driving if reporting an emergency.

I do not believe these prohibitions were an intended consequence, though some believe hams are no better drivers than the public and should not have an exemption. But all other FCC Part 90 radio users, utilities radios, volunteer EMS and firefighters, and GMRS Part 95 users are likewise effected. Few of our radios presently have handsfree devices for PTT use, though some are emerging. That will require more years in development however.

While it may take some time to address this, we have very little. For now, I suggest you write to your PA state senator and copy your PA representative for your districts. You can find them online. Suggest they delay the approval and get more input from the volunteer responders in the Emergency Services effected by this and also The National Association for Amateur Radio, our ARRL. Such subject matter experts can best help guide the committee to make a better and reasonable law which still protects the public from the distracted driving caused by using interactive mobile devices while driving. That is the evil they seek to regulate. Not the two way radios we all use safely. More precise definitions of the different technology can solve the ambiguity.

Caution though, do not argue that the law is generally unreasonable or denigrate the motives of the proponents of the bill. We know they mean well. We know they generally like hams and emergency responders. Who among us has not seen distracted driving from texting or looking down at a cell device while driving? I see it every day.

The issue is really well meaning legislators are not properly defining the technology they seek to regulate while driving. Also, some in the past claimed that the law does not apply to ham radio as we are emergency responders of some sort. That is a stretch - please avoid such arguments. Even emergency responders responding to a 911 call in their personal vehicles (as I do several hundred times a year) are prohibited from using their public safety radio service HTs or mobile radios, even if attached to the vehicle, if it requires holding something to use the device. That cannot really be intended, but many agree with my professional analysis of the effect of the imprecise language as passed.

Please search for SB 37 in the PA government website and see the latest marked-up bill. It will take me some time to get a "clean" version of the marked-up bill posted somewhere, but I will announce where we can post it when my office staff cleans up the markups, strike-outs and underlining so you can see more easily what language is left. What was changed or stricken out is evident in the official posted markups online. You will see our long-lasting exemption taken out.

Your emails and/or phone calls to YOUR Representatives and Senators in PA are effective. A well constructed personal email is likely the best bet. They get read by staff. Each single response counts. It will give legislators a pause to think and inquire further. After all, this bill has been drifting around for some years. A few more weeks delay is

warranted. I have spoken with many about this bill and its effect. If you have a different opinion or any suggestion, please let me know. Time is short.

73, and I will see you on the radio. But maybe not while mobile.

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Attention: If other ICARC members would like to contribute to this Newsletter, please contact or submit articles to the Newsletter editor, N3LT via email at n3lt@gmail.com by the middle of each month. Preferred document format is **.pdf**. All submissions are subject to approval for publication by the editor.