

Amateur Radio: The “Cockroach” of Communications

No, I'm not trying to insult Amateur Radio operators; quite the contrary. As you read on, you'll see that I am actually paying the Amateur Radio Service a very high compliment.

Consider the fact that the lowly cockroach has been around for about 350 million years. During that time, while many other creatures have become extinct, the cockroach has earned a reputation for being a true survivor. For example, the cockroach is reported to be able to withstand between 67,500 and 105,000 REMs, depending on the species. That's about the equivalent of a thermal-nuclear explosion. By contrast, a lethal dose of radiation for humans is about 800 rems. So, if we were to experience a nuclear holocaust, scientists theorize that approximately three-quarters of the world's cockroach population would survive unscathed.

Not unlike the cockroach, Amateur Radio has earned a reputation for coming out in the wake of a disaster to provide communications when other forms have been rendered useless. This capability to communicate during times of emergencies has been demonstrated time and time again over the years. You name the emergency – hurricanes, tornadoes, the events of September 11th – Amateur Radio has been there.

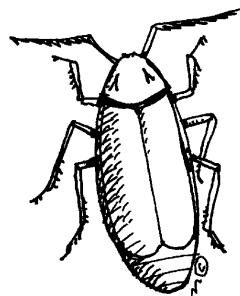
So, what is it about Amateur Radio that allows us to keep on communicating when other commercial forms of communications fail? Well, I believe there are two unique qualities that we possess, in terms of our communications capabilities.

First, we are **self-sufficient**. Each of us owns and maintains our own equipment. Properly equipped for emergency communications, we each have some sort of emergency power that allows us to communicate without commercial power. Because we are not dependent on a common infrastructure, we are a highly survivable form of communications. With an adequately stocked “go kit,” we are also highly

mobile, taking this communications capability where it is needed most. As a goal, each of us should be capable of operating independently for up to 72 hours.

Second, we are **interoperable**. We are able to come together and form ad hoc communications networks on short notice. This is where we really shine. As individuals, our capabilities are somewhat limited. As a team, however, we are able to form ourselves into a flexible communications network that is able to quickly adapt to the situation at hand.

The use of standard procedures and techniques is what allows us to be effective when we come together as a network. Training and certification programs, such as the ARRL's Emergency Communications Certification Course, provide the fundamentals and set the standards. By joining a local ARES or RACES organization and participating in drills, nets, and public service events, we practice and refine the skills and techniques we will need in an emergency to quickly become a cohesive team.



Our interoperability is further enhanced through the adoption of technical standards. Things as simple as using the standard Powerpole connectors on our rigs or pre-programming a standard set of frequencies increase our flexibility and versatility during a disaster.

So, in the aftermath of a disaster, not only will the cockroach survive; Amateur Radio will be there, too.

73, Craig LaBarge WB3GCK