City of Ottawa

Team leader reported on meeting(s) with John Ash, the new manager of the emergency measures unit of the City of Ottawa. It seems that Mr Ash understands who we are, what we can do and what we can't. He seems willing to commit some funding for ongoing operations and will look at project related funding as well (these two items correlate roughly to "O&M" and "capital" funding in the federal world).

Repeater Status

- The packet station no longer interferes with the voice repeater.
- The eastern regional repeater is ready to go into position and should be up "soon". (It is expected to go into the fire station on Charlemagne.
- The western repeater still needs some work, but a temporary site has been identified for it (fire station on Eagleson). It should be in place soon, but not as soon as EMV East.

Projects

The antenna building sessions were a mixed success. The antennas built worked. The participants learned a few things and enjoyed themselves. The downside is that not many people participated. On the other hand, since the sessions ran long, we probably had as many people as we could reasonably handle at one time.

The programmer project involved building a kit to program the eeproms in the synthesizer chips for certain General Electric VHF and UHF radios that EMRG has. The kit had to be debugged as well, due to a flaw in the supplied P.C. board. Assembly and debugging was done by Dave, VE3KMV, in a fairly short time frame. The programmer works, the chips on hand were programmed to prove that we had the capability of bringing the G.E. radios into our bands.

The only problem is that we have many more radios than synthesizer chips for them. They are available from time to time on the used market for about $20. USD. Now that we know we can make them work, we can start to look at acquiring the chips. These radios will be useful as packet rigs, cross band and in band repeaters.

Group Session
The members divided up into small groups to determine the competence levels of the members in a variety of areas: Soldering skills, Project Management, Technical Project Management, radio and electronics theory, and other skills possessed by our members. Each subject area was graded as "1", not much skill or not much interest, "2" some skill but not an expert and "3" skilled and comfortable working in the subject area.

It was found that there was a wide range of skills, as expected, but all areas were well covered. Our membership also has a wide variety of useful skills in areas outside of the expected ones. The details of these skills would require one-on-one interviews to document, but if we asked for skills ranging from aircraft maintenance to building construction, we could probably find that skill among our members.

It was pointed out that many members have formal or informal access to other useful resources, and specialised equipment should the need arise.

Safety
The EMRG Team Leader has been thinking about formalizing our safety standards and practices, bringing safety more into the mainstream of EMRG activities. Topics included:

- Physical safety, (security of masts, elimination of tripping hazards due to coax on floors, etc);
- Electrical safety (using fuses near batteries, insulation of low voltage systems, containment of wet lead acid batteries indoors, grounding, lightning protection, etc.);
- RF safety (understanding and applying Safety Code 6, removing high level RF from populated areas inside buildings, etc.)

EMRG is looking at the idea of creating a position of safety officer as part of the emergency activation. The safety officer would inspect installations and operations during an emergency to ensure that the EMRG team members, partner staff and the public are not at risk due to EMRG operations.

There is also an opportunity to have someone also look at safety to recommend practices that allow us to do what we do in a safe manner.

Simulated Emergency Test
October 23 Ontario ARES is looking at an exercise to get all ARES groups to communicate with the provincial emergency operation centre (EOC). Ottawa ARES is more interested in communicating with similar groups in our neighbouring districts (Renfrew, Lanark, etc.)

Table Top Exercise

Operation Green Glow was conducted. It is an exercise designed to get people thinking about packing and transportation strategies in an evacuation condition. The exercise was conducted in small groups. The wording of the exercise caused considerable confusion, misunderstandings and general mayhem. In this sense, it met its objective of simulating the confusion that exists in real emergencies.

Chief lessons learned and brought forward to the meeting as a whole:

- Expect confusion but use your best judgement and be ready to change plans as the situation or your understanding of it changes.
- A little advance notice will make a big difference in the effectiveness of our deployment.
- A few small light items prepared ahead of time will make a big difference in how well we can deploy.
- In an emergency, we will have to expect that only a small percentage of our people will be able to deploy, either in the beginning or for later shifts.
- We can expect that shelter locations will have potable water, heat and power (most of the time). (We learned in August '03 that the shelters can be without power for up to a few hours while generators are cut over, refuelled or repaired)

Packet Training

Training will be in two sessions. The first will be held on a weeknight. It will assume that the student has all the hardware hooked up and the software loaded. It will concentrate on what the commands do, i.e. how to connect to another station, how to read messages and similar topics.

The second session will be held in a lab on a weekend. It will assume that the student has all the boxes (radio, computer, TNC, antenna) but needs help deciding what wires go where. There will be assistance provided in making cables and getting the boxes to talk to each other. Participants are expected to bring the required connectors along with the rest of their hardware.

Standard Radio Interface

EMRG Team Leader Peter Gamble, is developing a standard radio interface, and a standard TNC interface. The idea is to be able to plug any TNC in the EMRG inventory into any radio in the inventory without having to find or build the special cable to go between a particular radio-TNC combination. This may be expanded to include such signals as radio COS, radio "channel busy" (or squelch open), discriminator audio, and unemphasised audio in to the modulator.

These extensions would make it easier to connect two random radios together as a cross band (or in band) repeater. It also facilitates making audio distribution stations so an operator and logger can share the same radio while each having their own headset, microphone, push to talk switch and volume control. Other uses include audio extension cords.

Some cables have been built for the EOC radios to allow the operator to be up to fifty feet from the radio control head. This allows us to put operating positions in locations elsewhere outside the EOC room. If there was a standard interface, the concept could be extended to shelter radios and those used in other places.

The plan is to finalize one iteration of a design and release it to the membership for comments and changes. At some point a build session is going to have to be scheduled to make these interface cables and wire the radios and TNCs to them.