

EMRG Newsletter for September 2007

ARES & EMRG: Two names, One group, One Purpose



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Announcements:

September 29,
Annual General Meeting.
Check the web site for details.

September 26 & 27,
The Emergency Preparedness College is running exercises and could use the assistance of Hams with 2 meter rigs. Contact Mike Kelly VE3FFK or Brian Jeffrey VE3UU for details.

Quick Notes:

Tour Nortel - On May 6, EMRG provided communications for the Tour Nortel. We hope to make this

Feature Article

It's Baaack!! Will You Be Ready?

By Mike Kelly, VE3FFK

Well, it's not really back, and it may not come back, but we're coming up on the tenth anniversary of the Ice Storm (only one storm gets capital letters around here). In the spirit of trying to be proactive here is a stab at a first look at the '98 event, ten years after.

There is some good news and some bad news. The good news is that if it were to happen again, we would fare better because:

1. Since then, Y2K and 9/11 have made everyone more thoughtful about the breakdown of everyday services and routines.
2. Cellular telephones and their base stations are more wide spread. Their power requirements are lower and therefore their operating time is longer.
3. Batteries are better, so if you have them around chances are that they will still have some "juice" left.
4. LED flashlights are around and cheap. Both lights and radios with built in generators have become widely available.
5. It is now easy to find an FM radio for a buck. Any ham worth their weight can run one of these off of a potato if need be.
6. Governments, from the Feds with the Emergencies Act to municipalities are now thinking more about their emergency plans.
7. Since most of the people around here remember the "last one" the learning curve will be a bit better next time.
8. Local stores now stock generators of various types, and at a lower cost per kilowatt than a decade ago, even before inflation is considered.
9. FRS radios have become much cheaper. GMRS radios have become available. Both would help with community patrols.

our annual community service event, which provides an opportunity to test our skills and equipment. Thanks to Dave Harris and Bob Sharpe for their work in organizing the event, Harold Hamilton who provided additional coordination and all those who went out to help. There were about 25 people involved in the communications component. Check out Harold's article in this issue.

EOC Renovations - The City of Ottawa has renovated the EOC, making it more functional for operations. One of the big changes is a move to using portables in the EOC instead of permanently wired radios. The design for the new EMRG solution using portable radios is complete and the City has paid out \$3200 for additional equipment. We have a plan and we have the parts, now we have a lot of work to do.

Antennas At Fire Dispatch - EMRG submitted a business case to the City of Ottawa Office of Emergency Management (OEM), for funding to have professional riggers install a UHF antenna on the tower at Fire dispatch, for the EMRG UHF repeater. Ottawa Fire agreed with the proposed changes to the tower and OEM funded the effort. Today the work was completed, so there is a 4 bay UHF antenna near the top of the tower, plus a new tri-band antenna about 60 ft above ground level. You can try out VE3OCE UHF 443.800 +

City of Ottawa - The pieces are falling into place and we

10. The arrival of cable-internet based telephone systems means that there is another telephone system around if the phone lines go down (more pathways mean more redundancy).

11. The weakest points of the power distribution system, having failed and been rebuilt a decade ago, are all now relatively new.

12. As we have become more aware of energy efficiency, we have acquired energy efficient fridges, freezers and homes which will keep their temperature in the desired range for longer.

13. Many establishments, in the wake of the 2003 power outage, have had generators installed with enough capacity to run their businesses.

Now for the bad news. If it were to happen again, we would fare worse because:

1. We are all ten years older, both individually and as a community. This makes us more fragile, brittle and vulnerable.

2. There are more people around whose only phone requires power as well as a phone line.

3. Budgets are tighter, so stockpiles of emergency supplies will get older, smaller and less regularly maintained.

4. Tight budgets also mean there are fewer municipal workers around to help out.

5. The number of cell phone service providers has shrunk, so there is less redundancy in the hardware. This also applies to the radio systems around, as users migrate from having their own frequencies and repeaters to larger trunked radio systems. They are more efficient and robust, but when they fail they put more users off the air.

6. The oldest parts of the power distribution system are now a decade older than they were the last time. The trees around them that didn't get taken out last time are now ten years bigger.

7. Weather isn't getting any more predictable, nor are storms getting less severe.

8. AM radio which can reach the distance into an effected area has become scarcer as many broadcasters have moved to FM.

9. Suburbia is bigger, with more people spread out over more area, making them more dependent on car travel for everything. Community patrols have to cover more area, with more stops along the way. This will take more people and more communications to avoid duplication.

10. No two emergencies are exactly the same, or the same as the "last one" or the same as the one you practiced.

11. Staff turnover means that although people who are around remember the Ice Storm, they aren't working for the same company, or even in the same line of work as back then.

have lots of work to do in order to make use of the new antennas and EOC radios. I will be setting up some more work sessions over the summer, so we can keep the forward movement. The City of Ottawa will spend close to \$6000 this year in our yearly grant, plus special project funding. The support from the City remains strong and our recent discussions with the Community Services dept have opened up a great dialog.

About EMRG:

The *Emergency Measures Radio Group* (EMRG), which is located in the City of Ottawa, is made up of trained, federally-licensed, radio operators, who have made a commitment to volunteer their time and equipment in the event of an emergency.

EMRG is a local volunteer radio organization, also known as **Ottawa ARES** (or Amateur Radio Emergency Service). Two names, one group, one purpose.

The main role for EMRG is to provide emergency radio communications for humanitarian response organizations that do not have a radio system, lack capacity on their system, or normally rely on regular phones and cell phones.

For more information and resources, visit our web site at: <http://www.emrg.ca/>.

12. The generators installed between 1998 and now haven't always been maintained. If they start, who knows how long they will run, or where their owners will get the fuel for them.

All in all, the way I look at it, there are more things in our favour this time around.

For a quick refresher, take a look at "Stories from the Ice Storm" by Mark Abley. It's in the library. Some of you have scrap books of clippings etc. from back then. Dig them out.

It's only September but all too soon we'll be in the midst of the winter season. There is going to come a wintery Monday morning and the weather network will be telling us that we can expect freezing rain from Wednesday to the end of their long term forecast.

What do you do? Will you be ready?

Events

Tour Nortel

By Harold Hamilton VA3UNK

Sunday May 6th 2007 was a beautiful sunny yet cool day, ideal weather for the Tour Nortel.

This was the first time the EMRG group has been the principal organizer of a major public service event. In previous years, a member from the OARC was the principal organizer. He has moved, so we now had an opportunity. EMRG has been involved in previous years but not the principal organizer. Our repeater however has been used in the past.

Our role: Provide "emergency" communications for event organizers. This included medical emergency traffic. Other traffic included event situational awareness. For example, where are the lead cyclists, first aid resources, etc.

As most of you are aware, the Tour Nortel is a bicycle/rollerblade/walking charity event with the various courses all starting at the Nortel Campus on Moodie Drive. The longest "tour" goes along Corkstown Road to March Road, then along Hertzberg, and eventually crosses March Road at Terry Fox.

The course goes through part of Kanata and then goes along 2nd Line to Thomas Dolan Drive. The cyclists pass through Dunrobin then they turned down 6th Line until they reach Vance Side Road. Here they turned right and proceeded to Baskin Beach Road. Turing left cyclists go as a far as the turnaround point - Baskins Beach. This part of the route encompassed 35 kilometres of the 70 kilometre course.

The other courses had different turnaround points. For example, the 30 kilometre course turned around near 2nd line and March Road.

In order to service the cyclists, there were four rest areas. These rest areas included washrooms and first aid. The rest areas usually had about 10-15 volunteers. We placed 2 radio operators at these and other locations.

Others volunteers and pairs of radio operators were placed at high traffic intersections. They were present to ensure cyclists were able to proceed safely.

In addition to stationary positions there were a number of "admin/safety" Tour Nortel vehicles. We deployed one mobile vehicle and two bicycle mobiles.

For each stationary position, each pair of operators was expected to be setup by 8 am. One person worked on the repeater (VE3EMV - 146.880). The other worked on a simplex frequency. A variety of equipment was used including 50 watt mobiles, 5 watt handhelds, 1/4 wave antenna, 5/8 antenna, and beam antennas.

Some radios ran off their car battery while others ran off an "independent" (portable) battery.

The majority of the traffic was done on the repeater. Tour Nortel personnel were able to listen to traffic.

A few times they came to radio tent to get additional information for some of the medical situations.

As the rest areas and road intersections started to close down we followed suit starting about noon.

We were done and off the course by about 13:30. The duration of the event was 5-6 hours.

The weather for the day was great and we were able to muster up about 25 volunteers most of whom were EMRG members. They are too many to name in this article but our sincere thanks to all who participated. Having said that, sincere thanks to Dave VE3KMV and Bob VA3QV who were the principal organizers.

For those of you who didn't have an opportunity to participate, keep the Tour Nortel in mind next year. It's a great way to combine your interest in amateur radio with providing a community service.

Team Leader's Message

A Year of Accomplishments

It has been another good year for EMRG, with lots of opportunities, activities and achievements. We continue to have a great relationship with our key partners, the City of Ottawa and Ottawa Red Cross. This year alone, the City of Ottawa has funded our yearly \$1000 operational grant, plus the EOC renovations for \$3300 and the Antenna changes at Fire Dispatch for \$1400. This support is based on simple business cases that link requirements to solutions, which defines the value for the City of Ottawa.

The year has been challenging for me personally as I struggle with some health issues, which have limited my EMRG activity at times. The management team has been great, forcing me to hand off more responsibility to them, which is ultimately good for the health of EMRG as a group.

This year we will focus on strengthening the relationship with our 2 primary partners; the City of Ottawa Department of Community Services and the Ottawa Red Cross. These two organizations have a requirement for EMRG services and have expressed an interest in working with EMRG. Once we complete the Red Cross radio system, the EOC upgrades and the EMRG Communications Room upgrades at Fire Dispatch, we can focus on more operational activity, with training and exercises using these updated facilities.

In recent months, RAC has identified that the future of Amateur radio depends on the ability of Amateurs to show the value of Amateur radio as a service in the community. EMRG is the vehicle in Ottawa for doing this and we will continue to work hard as a group. Ultimately the success or failure depends on individual Amateurs. While you are involved, many others are not, so we need to make sure Amateurs in Ottawa are aware of how to get involved. Be sure to tell other amateurs about EMRG – Ottawa ARES.

This is the first newsletter in some time and I thank Brian Jeffrey (VE3UU) for taking on the task. Putting together a good newsletter takes a lot of work, both to get people to write articles and pulling it all together on a regular basis. If you have an idea for an article, do not be shy, newsletters are for all of EMRG, not just a tool for the management team.

Hopefully I'll see you at the next EMRG Meeting in September.

Peter Gamble – VE3BQP
Team Leader - EMRG
Emergency Coordinator - Ottawa ARES