

THE EXPERIMENTER

The Official Technical Newsletter of The ARRL West Central Florida Section



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As I write this, the early days of April are here, along with the occasional rain storm with it's associated lightning and high winds. We all tend to think of the dangerous time of year being June through November, the traditional Hurricane Season. Every year there are "Hurricane Expos" and regional and national "Hurricane Conferences". All with the stated objective of preparing both the responders and the general public to better deal with the results of severe weather.

The truth is that dangerous weather can hit any time, any place, not just a particular season. Just last night, the Technical Net was interrupted by a priority announcement of a Tornado Warning for several counties within the West Central Florida Section. For the amateur radio operators in the section, it is very important to not file away our response plans and equipment until June arrives. Luckily, no Tornado touched down and no significant damage was reported, but what if it had? What would our response be if the EOC in one of our counties reported severe damage to an area? Would our "GO-Kits" be stocked with new materials and supplies, or would we have to madly dig through the storage shed just to find the back pack we usually put our stuff in?

Severe weather occurs frequently enough in this part of Florida that our "Go-Kits" should always be ready. They should always have up to date materials and supplies in them and we should be able to grab them and head out the door in as short a time as possible.

Building a Go-Kit is just like any other project. There is a list of components, an enclosure (the back-pack or duffle), and a certain order of assembly. As with almost any project, there are some areas that are vital and common to all go-kits, and there are some areas where one will customize the kit to fit the specific needs of your response task. The most important thing is to build it and have it ready when it is needed.

Below is a Go-Kit "Recipe" that has worked well for many hams for many years.

EQUIPMENT LIST FOR EMERGENCY DEPLOYMENT

ARES/RACES ID

Handy-Talky with Flexible Antenna

Speaker Mike or Headset for HT

Magnetic Mount Antenna to match HT

Any Necessary Adaptors to connect HT to Mag-mount Antenna

Power cord to power HT from Vehicle Cigarette Lighter Socket

Adapter to use power cord direct to battery

Gel Cell or Motorcycle Battery 13.8 Vdc

Trickle Charger for Battery

Street Map of County

25 feet of Coaxial Cable with connectors installed

"Barrel" Connector to mate coax to Mag-mount Antenna

Small Tool Kit

Flashlight and spare batteries for it

Pen and Paper

Personal First Aid Kit

Personal Medications and Hygiene Items

Sunscreen

Change of clothes

Rain Gear

Insect Repellant

All of this equipment should fit in a moderately sized gym bag or back pack. The electronics and electrical devices should be routinely tested and cycled on a regular basis so that when needed, sometimes at a moments notice, they will be ready to use.

Useful additions might be items such as a "Hard Hat", a flashing personal light such as bicyclists use when riding at night, and Trail Mix or other easy to store food items. Another useful item is a short list of important frequencies, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses for local police, fire, hospitals, EOC's, weather service, relief agencies and the like. This should be laminated for all weather protection.

An excellent article on an antenna to improve your HT's range can be found at the following web address: www.athensarc.org/portable.htm

Your local ARES/RACES organization can provide you with other information such as the location of designated shelter sites together with the capacities of each and available emergency communications equipment such as pre-mounted antennas, coax and the like.

All of this gear is nice, but unless you train with it on a regular basis, and maintain and update it as well, you may be disappointed when the need for it arises. Attend training from your local organization regularly and participate fully in events throughout the year.

Over the past several months, our local area has seen a huge increase in the number of people becoming licensed hams. Many of these fine people have come to us through various CERT team efforts and some are even professional responders from various Fire Departments and other agencies. These new hams really are motivated to participate in any disaster response. You more veteran hams out there must make sure that the information on Go-Kits and other aspects of emergency preparedness gets passed on to the newer members of our hobby. Often they have become hams because they were attracted to the public service aspects of amateur radio, so it makes perfect sense to do everything we can to facilitate their smooth transition to valuable members of the team.