

September 13, 2020 WC-ARES Net Training: Staying informed when the lights go out

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Power going out- well around here, the main reason for a long-term power outage would appear to be weather. In my memory, the longest period without power here was due to an ice storm. And it was three days long. But lightning storms as well as tornados can also contribute to this event.

As far as communications goes, the first line of defense is of course Cell Phones. Now we all know that in a large event, this will be unusable as everyone will want to be on it. But there is some access to radars and social media that can and would be handy. But, again the limitations besides number of people using it is battery life, either the batter on the phone or the battery or generator on the cell towers in the area. So even if your phone does work, consider turning it off when not being used. Some families have an emergency plan where if they have not made contact, they check in at the top of the hour. That way the phone only has to be turned on for a few minutes. If this is something you want to do, you may consider choosing another time as is everyone choses the top of the hour, so that everyone would not be on at the same time. That would not work well either.

Television would be the next level. A lot of channels are over the air now and knowing how the use that capability with a power inverter off a battery or having a 12 volt TV can be a great way to gather information especially as the emergency is happening, when the tornedo, or the hurricane for example is still in your area. AM/FM radio would be next, again having knowledge of what radio channels would carry the best information is something you should figure out before you need it. While NOAA can be a source of good information, it is not something that can keep you up to date at the time of the event. Only help you gather information for the next few hours or days.

So now we get down to what is closest to our hearts. Ham Radio. As we know, using ham radio can be and is a life saver. But only if we know what and how to use it to the best of our ability. Weather nets, and Nets in general can be great. Especially when people on the net have access to NWS Chat and GRV level 3 as this information can be the timeliest for getting emergency information for what is going on in your area right now. But just like cell phones- batteries on the repeaters can and will be a limiting factor. So what then? Well that is what we have been working on as a group. Simplex. Knowing how far you can reach simplex and who you can communicate with can and will be a live safer. So as we move forward on out Simplex exercises, please get involved and help and learn what you can do and who you can hear. Williamson County ARES has its own version of what is called the Wilderness Protocol. This protocol is much like the schedule we talked about earlier for contact with family. To that end, if the power is out for period of time of 6 hours or longer, and that time then crosses over midnight: Starting at midnight, every three hours on the hour for as long as needed, Net Control will come up on the repeater and/or simplex. The purpose will be to disseminate and collect needed information for situational awareness as well to make a list of unmet needs from members in order to provide safety and security.

For HF- can you do this? And if so, do you have a NVIS antenna? This antenna will be your best bet for close communications. They don't have to be expensive. So if you don't have one, make one. Again, it is another way to communicate.

So as we close this up- we see we are once again down to batteries, solar power, and generators. What do you have? What do you have to recharge them? What do you need to live for a few days? Remember, keeping the refrigerators and freezers going can make your life a lot easier.

This concludes tonight training, please hold me short time with respect to the remainder of the net.