



THE SALINE COURIER

Benton, Bryant radio hams plan public demonstration of emergency communications

Despite the Internet, cell phones, email and modern communications, every year whole regions find themselves in the dark. Tornadoes, fires, storms, ice and even the occasional cutting of fiber optic cables leave people without the means to communicate.

In these cases, the one consistent communications service that reportedly never has failed has been amateur radio. These radio operators, often called “hams,” provide backup communications for everything from the American Red Cross to FEMA and even for the International Space Station.

Peg Porterfield, secretary/treasurer of the Benton Amateur Radio Society, reported that local hams will join with thousands of other amateur radio operators showing their emergency capabilities this weekend.

"We will be setting up our equipment at 10 a.m. and will conduct continuous radio operations from 1 p.m. Saturday through 1 p.m. Sunday at Mills Park in Bryant," Porterfield said. She noted that during the past year ham radio operators have provided critical communications during unexpected emergencies in towns across America including the California wildfires, winter storms, tornadoes and other events worldwide.

This weekend area residents will have a chance to meet and talk with Benton and Bryant's ham radio operators and see for themselves what the Amateur Radio Service is about as hams across the country will be holding public demonstrations of emergency communications abilities.

This annual event, called Field Day, is the climax of the week-long Amateur Radio Week sponsored by ARRL, the national association for Amateur Radio.

"Using only emergency power supplies, ham operators will construct emergency stations in parks, shopping malls, schools and backyards around the country," Porterfield explained. The group's slogan, "When All Else Fails, Ham Radio Works," is more than just words to the hams as they prove they can send messages in many forms without the use of phone systems, Internet or any other infrastructure that can be compromised in a crisis. More than 35,000 amateur radio operators across the country participated in last year's event.

"The fastest way to turn a crisis into a total disaster is to lose communications," said Allen Pitts of the ARRL. "From the earthquake and tsunami in Japan to tornadoes in Missouri, ham radio provided the most reliable communication networks in the first critical hours of the events. Because ham radios are not dependent on the Internet, cell towers or other infrastructure, they work when nothing else is available. We need nothing between us but air."

Porterfield said the Benton Amateur Radio Society invites the public to come and see ham radio's new capabilities and learn how to get their own FCC radio license before the next disaster strikes.

She pointed out that amateur radio is growing in the United States, with more than 700,000 amateur radio licensees in this country and more than 2.5 million around the world.

Through the ARRL's Amateur Radio Emergency Services program, ham volunteers also provide both emergency communications for thousands of state and local emergency response agencies and non-emergency community services— all for free.

No admission fee is required to attend the weekend events.