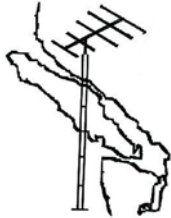


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Repeater 146.84 MHz -600 T100.0



Special points of interest:

- Amateur radio repeater system hub knocked out by violent wind-storm
- Loss of tower keenly felt by radio operators and emergency organizations.
- WARA's proud tradition of first-rate community service, emergency projects and education continues as strong as ever.

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148 km/h Windstorm Topples Key Amateur Radio Tower

By Alan Muir, VE7BEU

During a violent windstorm on the night of December 13, 2006, the amateur radio repeater tower on Mt. McDonald (west of Langford) was badly damaged. The tower folded in half, and it had to be quickly cut down to prevent damage to neighbouring emergency communications structures. As a result, the tower and most of the attached antennas were totally destroyed.

The repeater system, owned and operated by the Westcoast Amateur Radio Association, was crippled by the initial tower damage, and put out of service after the collapse. Fortunately, there was no loss of radio equipment, which includes at least 12 transmitters, operating on 5 different radio bands. The Mt. McDonald site is WARA's primary repeater, the hub for a network of repeaters that provide local hams with reliable radio coverage spanning Greater Victoria, the Gulf Islands, Juan de Fuca Strait, the West Coast Trail as far as Tofino, and the adjacent parts of north-west Washington State, an area estimated to exceed 25000 square kilometres, or 9000 square miles.



The toppled tower and former antennas transformed into a pile of scrap metal

Within days after the disaster, volunteers assessed the damage and installed temporary antennas on fence posts. By mid-January, the club trailer had been moved to the site and its 20-foot tower put into service. Communications has been restored to the local area, but reception is not great and overall performance is maybe 30% of the norm, at best. The loss is keenly felt by local hams and emergency organizations that rely on auxiliary amateur communications.

Public Service and Emergency Communications

Hundreds of dedicated volunteers blend their hobby of Amateur Radio with a willingness and desire to serve their community. Hams are anxious to help during local emergencies, large-scale disasters, and routine community events.

When the phone, cellular and internet systems fail and the power goes out, we rely on hams to keep urgent communications going.

Recall the Snow Storm of 1996, the 2003 BC Forest Fire Season, the Gulf Islands Telephone failure, this winter's incessant rain and wind storms, the Amber Alert program.

The ability to communicate both locally and over long distances with a minimal reliance on infrastructure is unique. Ham radio operators are

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WARA Main Repeater Tower during better times!

“Amateur radio is a very effective medium for helping a student learn to communicate with others”

Public Service and Emergency Communications

From Page 1

aware of their abilities and responsibilities and are enthusiastic to assist. Every municipality in the CRD has an emergency program, where local hams can train and practice. They conduct emergency traffic nets weekly to test equipment and hone their skills. Province and Canada-wide emergency traffic nets are also conducted by hams 365 days of the year.

The Greater Victoria community thrives on its annual events and festivities. The Times-Colonist 10k Run, Royal Victoria Marathon, Cardinal Law Bike Race, the Swiftsure Weekend, Ride for the Disabled, Mind Over Mountain, triathlons, Gut-

busters Trail Run, CARHA Old-timers Hockey—the list is long.

Cellular coverage is sporadic around our shores, and the sponsoring organizations therefore rely on hams to provide routine and emergency communications for their events.

The bike race has seen some serious accidents, the marathons generate a surprising number of emergency aid calls and when the annual Swiftsure sails our waters, Hams are on site at HQ, in the lonely communications van on the pier, at Sombrio Point to relay messages through day and night, around the clock!

Hams are always there to help!

Central Middle School Enrichment Series

WARA provides instructors in an optional class at Central Middle School in Victoria entitled “Youth and Ham Radio”. The class is part of the School’s Enrichment Series, which can include classes in sports, shop/crafts or arts and theatre related classes. The 10-week Amateur radio class is the ONLY class that makes use of outside instructors, members of WARA. (Thanks Nick, Kip and Doug.)

The students are given a basic understanding of Amateur Radio, including the phonetic alphabet, on-air operating procedures and even Morse code. “The instructional staff feel that Amateur radio is a very effective medium for helping a student learn to communicate with others – to be a normal, well spoken member of his/her community”, says WARA instructor Terrance Berscheid, VE7TBC. “I originally brought in a Morse Code key and oscillator to show them that Morse Code was

still used. I couldn’t believe it when several students ‘took control of the key’ and how they navigated directly to it whenever it was brought in.”

Students learn that Amateur radio is a hobby and that it provides a vital service to the community in times of disaster or emergency. In 2005 Central Middle School conducted a mini-Emergency Preparedness Exercise where student teams conducted searches and communicated over amateur radio. WARA’s goal in assisting with this course is to encourage interest in the pursuit of an Amateur radio license, and to encourage students to become involved in public service in the community.

Kathie Cross, VA7KTH, a Family Counselor at Central Middle School, is the staff member who coordinates the ‘in-school’ Amateur radio activities.



Central Middle School student working with a wooden Morse Code key

Field Day June 23/24, 2007

WARA will be once again be participating in the ARRL Field Day contest this year. Field Day will be held from Saturday, June 23 to Sunday, June 24, 2007 at a location to be announced. Crews will start setting up the around 0930 on Saturday morning, for a 12-noon start time. The contest duration is 24 hours, and the station will close at noon on Sunday (at the latest). Sunday

morning propagation might not be that good, and also, the time zone void starts to take place, i.e. the east coast is 3 to 4 hours ahead of us, and they start shutting down by the time we have had breakfast. Members of the public are welcome to visit and/or participate. Jim Chew VE7GOF is the Field Day coordinator. Contact Alan at va7awm@shaw.ca to register.

Emergency Communications Team Helps Red Cross

WARA has an agreement with the Canadian Red Cross – BC Coastal Region to provide radio communications during an emergency. The Red Cross recognizes that WARA can render valuable aid maintaining continuity of communications during disasters and emergencies when regular communications are disrupted.

WARA's Emergency Communications Team will staff and maintain a radio communications room at Red Cross house to provide the vital voice radio and digital communications required to allow Red Cross to fulfill its mandate of reuniting families through their Registration and Inquiry Program. Registration and Inquiry (R&I) is the process where people affected by a disaster go to a Reception Centre and are registered to indicate

that they are safe and where they are currently staying. This information is then sent to a Central Registry and Inquiry Bureau (CRIB) and is matched to Inquiry calls coming in from friends and family. The CRIB will be in a remote location such as Vancouver or Calgary dependent on the type, size and location of the disaster. Long distance communications to Calgary would likely be established using WARA's HF short-wave radio at Red Cross House.

Len Howland VE7BSA is the WARA Director in charge of the Emergency Communications Team and maintains a 95-page emergency response manual. Len coordinates ECT activities including weekly emergency communications tests on the WARA repeater frequency.



Red Cross House with ECT Antenna

Extreme Weather Hits Port Renfrew

The extreme winter weather hit the remote B.C. community of Port Renfrew with a vengeance, resulting in widespread utility and telecommunications failures, putting its residents at some degree of risk. The telephone building was wrecked by a large tree, and broken batteries leaked acid over the equipment, compounding the damage. At the worst of the storms, the power was out, phone lines down, emergency radios dead. Even the satellite phone the community has for such emergencies could not get through. The ONLY method of communications to the outside world was through amateur radio.

The WARA repeater system beams directly into Port Renfrew, and also provides coverage on

West Coast Rd. The first calls to Telus from Port Renfrew's emergency services agencies were relayed by amateur radio to Victoria where the requested landline calls were made. Without the amateur radio connection, there would have been delays contacting utilities. Eventually, Telus provided emergency communications services to the town using their light truck mounted emergency satellite cellular system.

Dan Tennant, VE7DRT, Fire Chief of Port Renfrew, reports that since the storms, an emergency ham radio station has been formally established in the community and improvements have been made to the fire department radio system.

“the ONLY method of communication to the outside world was through amateur radio”

Repeater Saves the Day for University of Washington Seismology Team

Dear Mr. Muir, Please help me locate a ham I contacted on your repeater. On Sept. 28th, I was on Glacier Peak, WA, 8,000' elevation, repairing a seismology station for the University of Washington. We fixed the station but had no way to determine if the seismology lab was receiving the telemetry data.

After attempting many other repeaters from my handheld, I was able to get into your repeater on 146.660 and got hold of a ham, Nick. I had very low signal strength and we could barely hear each other, but he copied my traffic and made a phone call to the UoW for me on his own dime from a nearby pay phone. He got a hold of my lab and they said they were unable to receive the data

from the station. He then relayed this information to me. The solar panels were indeed working and we have since been able to receive data from the instrument, which our director had previously thought was impossible. We tested the batteries and found them at 15.5V! It was simply a matter of getting the antenna/panel mast upright and anchored securely.

I wanted to thank Nick for his assistance and generosity, though I have no way of getting hold of him. If you could do so, I would greatly appreciate it. 73, Graylan Vincent, KC7YVN

Nick Filpula VA7NAF is a local ham

Extracted from Feb. 2006 QuarterWave



Graylan Vincent KC7YVN at the remote seismic monitoring site

