

Emercomms/Radio Communications Voluntary Services **Spectrum Forum Report**

The services of RAYNET were called upon by User Services seven times for emergencies during this last year, including one in North Anglia on 13th Feb 2005, which gave an eerie reminder of the circumstances of 1953, which resulted in the formation of RAYNET.

Increasing use is being made of emercomms frequencies on 4m, 6m and HF, plus 23 cms, which is continuing to be shown to be very effective in tunnel communications exercises around the country. Proposals have been put forward to enhance the use of 5 MHz for emercomms by broadening the criteria for the use of Talkthrough to this band (the RAYNET Talkthrough Permit system provides a temporary cross-band or in-band linking facility to relay traffic across or to specific areas involved with the emergency, exercise or event as the case may be). Also RAYNET has been approached by No. 2 Signals Brigade to explore the possibility of interoperability tests on 5 MHz in a series of exercises next year. The new UHF wide-spaced 7.6 MHz Emercomms Talkthrough Channel has also proved popular, judging from Talkthrough Permit reports

Thus emercomms frequencies are seeing quite a good amount of use and occupancy – particularly at a weekend. Many Groups however are upset at the change of wording regarding these frequencies as detailed in the UK Bandplan footnotes – “these frequencies may be used by emergency communications groups” - particularly the interpretation of the meaning of the word ‘may’ - and have requested that the wording be returned to ‘Emergency Communications Priority’, as it was formerly.

Internationally, the major emergency occurrence involving amateur radio has been the Tsunami Disaster. This has been well documented elsewhere, but it is noteworthy that not just HF and VHF were used, but also Echolink; several UK amateurs taking turns as Net Control in the Tsunami Relief Net Conference

Also internationally, the first Global Amateur Radio Emergency Conference – GAREC 2005 – took place in Tampere, Finland on 13/14th June this year, with nearly 50 delegates representing 17 countries, including all 3 IARU Regions. This resulted in a great sharing and pooling of information. The Tsunami area communications on HF highlighted the difficulty in finding reasonably clear channels, resulting in nets being spread over various frequencies, which needed publicising in an attempt to keep them clear for traffic. The outcome of this was an official recommendation from the Conference for the 3 IARU Regional Conferences to consider the adoption of HF ‘Centres of Activity’ for emercomms traffic, just as for other specialist interests, in order that operators using those bands would be aware where emercomms activity would be likely to take place. Initial response from DXers has been quite positive so far and the Chairman of the Conference, IARU International Emergency Communications Coordinator, Hans Zimmerman, F/HB9AQS has requested liaison with each country’s bandplanners and other interested parties such as DXers to determine suitable frequencies.

In the UK, RAYNET has made a presentation to the section of the Cabinet Office responsible for communications in emergencies (the Central Sponsor for Information Assurance – CSIA) and has been in discussion with them over their needs and what we could provide. As a result, several new projects are being planned and it is quite likely that the expertise and knowledge of certain sections and groups of the Spectrum Forum may be called upon by RAYNET in the future.

In conclusion, the current deliberations with Ofcom show the need to get over to them, the government and the public at large aspects of Amateur Radio that are tangible, understandable and positive. Emergency Communications shows the humanitarian face of Amateur Radio – something that is readily identifiable. Let's employ that.

What is also worth considering is the concept of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) – between the Society and Ofcom. The RSGB – Network MoU is working very successfully and it's worth noting that the RA actually had an MoU with Ofcom for their changeover

Paul Gaskell, G4MWO
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