

Report

First EmCom Party on the Air

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by

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1. Background and objectives

There is countless number of cases where amateur radio operators have played a key role in the cases of emergencies. Our skills in building radio connections, our equipments and our will to help are our tools. To be honest we must say: we are not professionals of the emergency communications but we can be very effective and even irreplaceable as a first aid. Our opportunity to take care of the emergency communications in the cases of disasters is limited; a day or two – only in the very special case a longer time.

We are more effective in our own country than cross the borders. Most of IARU Region 1 member societies have some kind of emergency communications preparedness for national needs but practices can be very different. Disasters are not respecting borders. That is the reason why we must be also well prepared for emergency communications cross the borders.

That's the reason why the idea to organize First EmCom Party on the Air was born.

The party had three objectives:

- 1) to increase the common interest among member societies in emergency communications,
- 2) to test how useable our emergency centre-of-activity frequencies are cross the Region 1 on 40, 20 and 15 meters,
- 3) to create practices for international emergency communication between Region 1 member societies and special emergency communications groups

In the first EmCom party we emphasized in two first objectives. Also a special note was given: **This is not a contest – this is an emergency communication exercise!** It was very necessary and it seems that we must repeat it again and again in the future.

The HQ station OF3F was organized by Matti Rouhiainen OH2PO, Juhani Rouhiainen OH2BAH and Kari Ruokonen OH2NAS. The original plan to organize it by the writer of this report changed just few days before the 'D-day' due to urgent surgery. The team of OH2PO did everything extremely well after very short warning. I would like to thank them for good work! Their situation was like a typical case of disaster: be prepared – somebody might need your immediate help. Their team was prepared and extra good thing was: they got a good publicity in our national breakfast television.

Because of my recovery process this report is short and it is not covering all the possible data. UK's Raynet has produced an excellent report and I would like to ask you to read it on their web site.

2. Participation

Total number of participating countries was 27 and the number of participating operators was at least 100.

There was some confusion who can participate. We invited HQ –stations of the IARU Region 1 member societies to participate and also stations of the permanent emergency communications groups were welcomed to participate.

From the point of view of participation we can be satisfied. It was a good start for the new process.

3. Messages

What kind messages stations will send was maybe the most difficult thing in the planning of the EmCom Party. We ended up with following first phase message:

Report - a real RS
Bands - number of bands simultaneously in use by the station
Operators - how many operators are at the station
Power - how much power the station is running
Organization - the abbreviation of the participating organization

This means that we changed information about our present emergency communications capacity and also something about the propagation. These types of messages might be sometimes necessary when starting EmCom –operation.

In the second phase (= during the last hour) we wanted everybody to contact HQ station for giving a report of the activity: how many different stations were contacted on different bands.

4. Comments of HQ Station OF3F

1. We should use internationally accepted wording and phrasing in our operation when e.g. announcing our call.
2. The discipline of traffic was weak: e.g. too many just run over the HQ station without listening the frequency before starting to transmit. The final result was too often a mess.
3. Maybe we must rethink the frequency management – e.g. too many stations wanted to operate as close as possible the frequency of the HQ station (= centre-of-activity freq.).
4. We must learn to respect the authority of the HQ station.
5. QRM of non-participants.
6. Too many stations gave always 59 as a report – we wanted real reports.
7. Still too many behaved like testers.
8. We want to give special thanks to the operator of DL0NOT on 7 MHz about his excellent operation practices (clear wording, repeated announcing of call sign, purpose of transmission, attempts to notify disturbing stations, instructions to stations beyond the frames of the training and other).
9. 20 meters was the best band, 15 meters was too specific – useful only on south-north paths. QRM-level was very high on 40 meters.
10. In the future we should use only wire antennas and maximum 100 W power from batteries or generators. It's more realistic.

5. Comments of participants (just few of them)

RAYNET:

- Generally stations found the event interesting and challenging.

- Many 'soapbox' comments received reflected the perception of 'chaos and confusion' which resulted from the lack of net control along with concern over the image of such operations presented to other operators who may be listening or who found their own activities disrupted.
- All sizes of station have a place in HF emergency communications. Emergency Centres are not likely to be in locations favourable to HF but may require HF stations to provide an integrated National network.
- The proposal for another 'Party on the Air in March/April 2007 is ideal since HF conditions should not have changed greatly through the Sunspot cycle.

PZK

- There was not enough information. In the first phase most stations did not know what it was about in the exercise.
- Propagation into Europe on 21 MHz – zero. On 7 MHz local communication within Poland and surrounding European countries possible. In order to co-ordinate the action within Poland it would be necessary to make use of the 80 meters band.
- The action was very necessary.

HAMNET – South-Africa

- Conditions in South Africa were very poor. I (ZS6BUU) made contact with a few amateurs in the UK on EchoLink and Skype. Also via IRESC Conference link, I could listen to the activities being relayed over the Internet.
- I think many operators forgot that this was not a contest. They all tended to stick to the selected centre of activity frequencies which caused a bit of a pile-up and a lot of QRM
- They spoke too fast and left little time for one to write down details – typical contest modus operandi.
- In any event, final comment was that the chaps should have spaced their contacts wider instead of just hanging on the main frequency.

DARES – PI9D

- A great log with nice colourful maps about contacts

SA4DE – KRIS-06/LC-4

- It was a disaster. First after about 1 hour we heard OF3F on 7 MHz.
- At first the emergency frequency was occupied from a lot of stations, not aware of emergency communication and understanding: PSE QSY.
- Several HQ's used 750-800 watts. This is too much.
- To succeed is depending of operators skills

I would like to thank everybody who sent us their logs! Hopefully we can find somebody who is interested in to make more detailed analyzes of them.

5. Summary

The First EmCom Party on the Air was an experiment – first of its kind.

- a) We wanted to know if there is any interest to start exercising our EmCom skills cross the borders. The answer is YES!
- b) We wanted to know how many are interested in and what is their capacity. We learn that there are many active organizations around Region 1 with high skills and trained people.
- c) We wanted to know if some special practises are necessary for EmCom traffic cross the borders. Yes, those practises are necessary but we are still missing the detailed information. (We were not emphasized this item in November)
- d) We wanted to know how useful/necessary our centre-of-activity frequencies are. Yes, they are necessary but we need practices how to use them - e.g. all amateur radio operators should know that certain frequencies are for EmCom traffic. Then they will QSY immediately (hopefully) when EmCom traffic occurs.
- e) First EmCom Party was at same time a success and a mess. A success from the point of view of participation and common interest and a mess from the point of view of ‘how well organized we were for the flexible and skilful traffic’. BUT: we must remember the mess is a fruitful seed for the future exercises.
- f) We learned that it will take a quite long time before we will found solutions for the problems we have. It means that we have lot of work to do.
- g) It seems that also inside Region 2 and 3 is some interest to join our exercise. We can discuss it more in August during GAREC-2007 in Huntsville, Alabama (USA).

Second EmCom Party on the Air will be on May 5th, 2007 at 11-15 UTC. We invite all to participate. The protocol will be same as in November – if we change something we will announce it before mid April. Third EmCom Party on the Air is planned to be on November 17th, 2007. Then we ask all stations to operate using batteries/generators and maximum power of 100 W.