

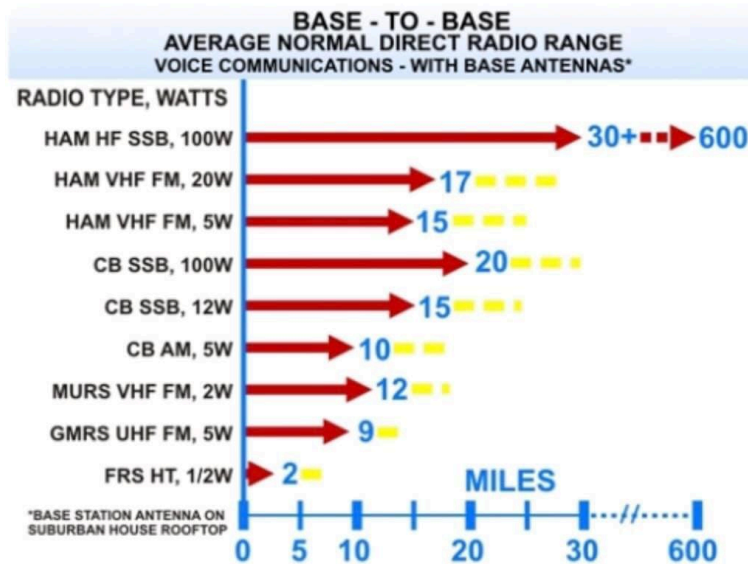
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### Emergency Communications with a Doughnut (and maybe coffee)

In November last year, I completed a series about emergency communications using the USGS analogy of the doughnut hole and WINLINK. Since then, I've looked at times when emergency amateur radio communications were needed. The idea of the doughnut hole and operating such that people need to communicate outside the hole held. WINLINK is not the only mode that might be useful in an emergency, but it has a versatility that some other modes may not. What we have not done in our club is "pull the trigger" getting organized to work in a doughnut hole should there be a need to provide communication. I suggested a few steps to get organized in my last series, but we didn't launch. This month, I observed:

1. A code error from one company caused a recent widespread internet outage.
2. I asked recent test candidates why they were getting their licenses, and the answer was "to do emergency communications."

Another significant development was the Idaho Section Emergency Coordinator (SEC), W7PJ Don Gardner, initiative within the WINLINK community. He designed a series of questions to assess individual members' preparedness for the weekly WINLINK Wednesday net. These questions focused on 'go kits' and the additional components required for a sustained operation. This emphasis on individual preparedness is not just a strategy; it's a mindset that empowers each member to take responsibility for their readiness.



The chart discounts the use of repeaters in the area and only displays point-to-point communication possibilities of our various available options. We are fortunate to have many repeaters in the Treasure Valley with diverse capabilities owned by many independent groups. This robust repeater availability in the Treasure Valley is a testament to our local emergency preparedness. It should instill confidence in our ability to withstand any local or widespread emergency in our area. If some calamity should befall

the Treasure Valley, operators with only a handheld radio can get out of the doughnut hole and provide needed communications services. Such is not the case in all areas of our State or the country.

When asked about my go-kit, I responded, "Why yes, I have a go-kit with accessories, including power, that I can deploy to almost anywhere and set up shop." My kit comprises several bags, including radio equipment, power, personal supplies, food, and water. It is organized so I can deploy for 30 days without re-supply. That is my go-kit. On the other hand, I may not be able or willing to deploy for an extended period. I am very close to being an octogenarian, which means I'm cranky and old and don't do well anymore in areas without services. As a result, I'm also no longer willing to be without certain creature comforts. I most likely can tolerate deployed life for five days, but that's it. Somehow, I don't think I'm the only one like that.

As it happens, I may not need to deploy if the emergency is in the Treasure Valley. I would be in the doughnut hole, able to communicate with the outside world. The added benefit is that I have all my necessities and desires without relocating. In this scenario, I can provide communication services for an extended period. However, if deployment is necessary, the younger generations, who can endure life without luxury for many days, must step in. This highlights the hope and reassurance that the next generation is ready and eager to take on emergency response challenges. You are, aren't you?

I contend that our first responders have hardened infrastructure and will tolerate almost any contingency if an emergency occurs in the Treasure Valley. However, as I said, that is not the case in all areas of our state or nation. Reliance on point-to-point communication methods will be necessary. This is not a backup plan; it's a proactive strategy. That is when the graph shown earlier comes into play.

If the emergency is in an area where repeaters are unavailable, point-to-point methods will be necessary to provide communication services to those who need and want them. As can be seen, the distance between the doughnut hole and the doughnut will determine what method can be used. It looks to me that unless the hole is small, that is less than 20 miles across, HF will need to be used. As a friend of mine used to say, "Physics is physics," meaning you can take a lot of shortcuts, but in the end, you'll need to pay attention to the laws of physics. When HF is used, things get more extensive and interesting to manage. You will need to discover what works well and what does not. Packing around a 100-watt radio with power systems and antennas instead of a 2-meter handi-talkie might present some logistics challenges. At the very least, it drives the composition of your deployment kit.

I will now beat the drum I've been pounding on. We are physically located in the Treasure Valley, particularly Meridian. The first responders have equipment and systems that can answer all the community's needs in an emergency. Cities like Star, Kuna, and Eagle may not have the infrastructure we are fortunate to have. I believe Boise and Meridian are well-positioned to manage any emergency. However, no agency is ready to manage the needs of community citizens in terms of communications during an emergency. This leads me to conclude that if we prepare for anything in Meridian, we should get ready to handle communications for community citizens when the usual means are interrupted.

Preparing to pass traffic for citizens during emergencies differs from helping first responders. To begin with, it's not flashy, and there is little opportunity to be a hero. You need not get your leotards with a big red 'S' on the front and a cape. It's routine stuff, where we act like old-fashioned Western Union offices. The premise is that the pipe that allows citizens to communicate is broken in an emergency. It may be because there is no power or the typical commercial infrastructure is not functioning because of a

calamity. You can bet that the commercial folks will be moving at break-neck speed to restore services, but there may be a gap in which nothing is being passed. Fire, flood, and earthquake events serve as an example.

That brings me to what we can offer. Using our gear and available modes, we can provide desired communications to the citizenry during distress. I am reminded that The American Legion Amateur Radio Club (TALARC) has the motto “When all else fails.” That means amateur radio can fill the void if other communications systems are not in service.



Now for the tricky part: when the need comes up, how do we know, and specifically, what do we do? That is the same dilemma facing groups like IOEM and Ada County. How do they get the word out, and where do people go? All the exercises I have witnessed are preplanned weeks in advance, and most people are prepositioned for the exercise. A couple of things to remember: IOEM and Ada County focus on first responders and not the community. Secondly, emergencies occur quickly, and there may not be any warning. Enter the nets!

That means someone must very rapidly recognize that there is an issue and a need. It might be obvious, but then maybe not. If you are sitting at home watching reruns of Gilligan’s Island or, in my case, Perry Mason, your focus is on things other than the community communications infrastructure. I believe that there will be something that brings the clue bird to plant itself on your shoulders. In my case, it might be our neighbor who comes over for everything, pounds on the door, reports there is an outage at her house, and asks if we are experiencing the same thing. Ok, now assume it's you or me who figures it out.

Once recognized, I suggest we jump on one of our net frequencies, such as the 94 machine or even our simplex net. Hark: do I hear the call for several people to be able to run a net? Yes. Understand that we won't be the only people who figure out that there is a need for communication. That means the

repeater frequencies may be quickly packed. If another group has taken the 146.94 MHz machine, we have alternatives. We have our simplex frequency using 147.42 MHz and a 70 CM repeater with a frequency of 443.000 MHz at our disposal. The first one to arrive is the leader, who starts the net. We should talk about that and practice it. Wow, what a concept. On the net, we will determine who does what and when. And we are off and running.

Remember that not everyone associated with Ada County or IOEM will be asked to respond. There are only a few spaces for amateur operators at each location. That means the rest of us need to fill in the needs not addressed by the first responders. Those needs include providing citizens with communications to people inside or outside the doughnut hole when services have failed. Now, we have our focus.

All that's left is to create and implement our plan. We need that discussion because I don't think we have a plan. I have some ideas, but they are not memorialized in any way. That will be a discussion item at the next meeting. Please develop some ideas so we can put them on paper for everyone to see. I'll also discuss some ideas on the nets in the coming weeks.

73

Rich