

The NEWSLETTER

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Mercury Amateur Radio Association - MARA - North America - North East



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E-mail your comments, ideas, or submissions to marane@mara.net or to ve1vq@eastlink.ca

Grandma Mara's RAMBLINGS

Even before December this year, we had snow. For once Grandma was ready for it, with the snow blower already prepped and waiting for the white stuff to fall. I don't know how it was in your part of the country but this one caught a lot of people around here by surprise. There was the typical and foreseeable last minute panic run on the grocery stores for food and the hardware stores for batteries, portable heaters, and even generators. Then there was the equally typical and also foreseeable panic run afterward by those who didn't panic beforehand.

My generator was all tested out with fresh fuel and stabilizer in the tank and more in plastic fuel containers (or [jerry cans](#)). My battery stash had been topped up several weeks earlier, even before the weather folks knew about the blow. And I had enough peanut butter and jelly on hand to feed the whole town - as long as they brought their own bread!

The storm arrived about when the weatherwomen and weathermen said it would. The snow fell, the winds blew, the trees uprooted and fell over on power lines, and the power went out. I could tell who in my neighbourhood had generators and who didn't by the lights in the houses (or by the lack of lights!). The folks that did were at their best, inviting in those that didn't and weren't prepared with alternative heat. Wendy and her family stayed with me for the week the power company was scrambling to restore service. Their problem was no generator, so no heat, and no way to cook. They brought food they liked, from their storage, and Wendy's mom and I took turns cooking the meals (although she always seemed to be saying it was her turn!). Even Walter showed up occasionally to check on us. How that man knows when I make my chocolate cake, I haven't figured out! He brought a small portable generator and kept Wendy's family freezer and refrigerator from thawing and from losing the food. He also brought a chain saw to clean up a couple of old trees that came down. Fortunately, none were supporting any of my wire antennas.

All in all, we had a good time while the power was down.



Fuel containers - red for gas and yellow for diesel.

Wendy, her dad and her brother got in some time on the air (my radio room is wired into the generator panel) talking with other hams in similar situations on emergency power. Her mother and I got to know each other better. Evenings would see us all playing board games, reading, or just plain talking.

We learned a few things from this "adventure". Wendy's father said he would be getting a small generator installed after things had settled down and the demand was back to normal, so they would at least be able to keep some heat going and prevent food spoilage. We were lucky this time as it was early and temperatures weren't low enough to freeze pipes. Walter said he would be looking for a couple of additional small portable generators so he could help more people like he was doing for Wendy and some of his immediate neighbors. I guessed that



I'd have to lay in some more chocolate cake ingredients, and several more containers of generator fuel. I'd had sufficient for the week, but another day would have seen the bottom of my supply and I would have had to syphon some from the vehicle. One of the things I have to do is to make sure I always have a full tank of gas and use that as my longer term storage.

The great thing about having food and essentials stored is that you don't have to do the panic thing before every storm. I always wonder if some of the stores put their prices up just a bit when they hear about a threatening weather pattern. They wouldn't do that, would they?



GOT SOMETHING YOU CARE TO SHARE?

A construction project, pictures of your station... home or mobile; a Field Day station at the chapel or elsewhere, a trip in the woods or some remote location with a portable rig, or maybe an antenna in your backyard. A poem or fiction or a real life story involving ham radio would be just fine as well.

Whatever it is, share it with us. Send it to one of the e-mail addresses shown on page one. Don't be shy now!

CULTURED CORNER

by ANØNMS

The latest report from our unnamed but usually reliable source is that ANØNMS is now able to put entire sentences made up of short words down on paper. Reportedly, the next step will be to turn on the computer and enter the user name and password! It appears that our columnist has a combination of cyberphobia (fear of computers), sophophobia (fear of learning), graphophobia (fear of writing), sesquipedalophobia (fear of long words), anginophobia (fear of choking), and phobophobia (fear of phobias). Okay, so maybe the last two are a bit of a stretch!

Regardless, our columnist is unable to connect the written strings of poetical words together for the time being. Seems that just the thought of doing so brings a cold sweat to the poet's brow.

Some of the suggestions for a temporary replacement for the column that have been tossed around include an outdoor theme about hunting and fishing (no connection to ham radio or MARA), a reality column about the day to day life of a ham radio operator (can you imagine anything more boring?), or a column about chess (okay, there is something more boring!).



In the end, we just decided to see how it works out.



TECH STUFF

By VE1VQ

You've heard them. Two hams rag-chewing across town from each other; both running their kilowatt+ amplifiers! They test by turning them on and off and comparing their signal levels at the other guy's receiver. Both agreeing that they really have to have the extra power to communicate, and occupying three or

four times the bandwidth that they actually need.

I've always been a QRPer at heart. I've never been a fan of running a kilowatt when going barefoot with a 100 watts or less will do just as well. I've never seen the need to run a 50-75 watt vhf transceiver in my vehicle. When you can't hear the repeater's transmitted signal, more transmitter power on your end won't make any difference.

In my first job in the late 1960s as a two-way radio technician, it was common when monitoring customer's frequencies to hear the users say, "Turn up your volume, I can't hear you!" The other person would come back with, "I turned up my volume control. Is that better?" To which the first individual would enthusiastically reply, "Oh yeah, that's a lot louder!"

I am aware that there are some repeaters where the receiver is low in sensitivity from poor design, misalignment, mis-tuning of the duplexer, or is de-sensitized by nearby RF sources; where having a higher powered transmitter in the car can make the difference in being heard or not. In most cases however, lower power will work just as well. For years, I operated two meter FM with 12 watts output. Later in my FM mobile life I used a handheld laying on the passenger seat with a speaker/mic and 3 watts output to a 1/4 wave on a roof mounted magnetic mount.

A 5/8 wavelength antenna will theoretically give you a gain of 3 db or twice the received and transmitted power relative to a 1/4 wavelength antenna. In practice, and even if the antenna is mounted in the clear on the center of the vehicle roof, this is seldom

realized. Locating the antenna on the front near the engine or around the trunk distorts the signal pattern because of the metal in the roof, usually producing a slight gain in one direction and a corresponding loss in the other.

A 1/4 wave antenna and base.



At highway speeds, the 5/8 antenna bends to the rear with the top portion moving toward the horizontal, further degrading and skewing the signal. By comparison, a 1/4 wave will wind deflect only very slightly. In actual practice, the distance gained by switching to a 5/8 wave antenna may only be a half mile. I'll leave it to the user to answer the question of whether the switch is worth the extra cost.

If you want to run a test yourself, arrange for another

In actual practice, the distance gained by switching to a 5/8 wave antenna may only be a half mile.

If you want to run a test yourself, arrange for another ham to transmit a low power signal.

ham to transmit a low power signal. You should do this on fairly level rural terrain so the test is not affected by reflections off hills or buildings. The two types should use the same mounting so that all you change is the base and whip. The coaxial cable and mount stay the same to eliminate these as variables. Drive away from the test signal until you almost lose it. Pull over and replace the 1/4 wave with the 5/8. Continue driving until once again the signal almost disappears. Don't take my word for it. Find out for yourself.

After reading this, a lot of people will think it sounds quite reasonable, but when they make the purchase, they are likely to go for what they have read and heard for years. Just don't say you haven't been told!



QUOTE OF THE MONTH

In the old days, it was not called the Holiday Season; the Christians called it 'Christmas' and went to church; the Jews called it 'Hanukkah' and went to synagogue; the atheists went to parties and drank. People passing each other on the street would say 'Merry Christmas!' or 'Happy Hanukkah!' or (to the atheists) 'Look out for the wall!'

~Dave Barry

DI-DAH-DI-DAH!



On behalf of all of us here at the newsletter, we wish you the best of the Christmas season. May your turkey be nicely browned and not burnt. May the stuffing be thoroughly cooked so you don't get sick.

May you receive a toy for Christmas, no matter what your age. May you be able to stuff yourself at the diner table and find that you have not gained a single pound (or 0.45 kilogram) when you step on the scales the next day. May you find that you have enough batteries for all of those "batteries not included" toys.

May you receive a toy for Christmas, no matter what your age.

More importantly, may you be in good health. May you and your family be together sometime during December, to feel the joy of each other's company. May all of your differences with others be forgiven and forgotten.

And most importantly, may you feel the real spirit of the Christmas season, and share it with everyone you meet.

Merry Christmas!
VE1VQ

ARRL Field Day is June 23-24, 2012

ARRL Field Day is the largest on-the-air operating event in Amateur Radio. It draws tens of thousands to the airwaves each year, bringing both new and experienced amateur radio operators together for a weekend of fun!