

Ten things to do, with a handheld radio

July 2018

K Barnsdale ZL3KB

This series of articles are intended to give the newcomer to ham radio an insight into some of the things you can do with a handheld dual band radio.

10: Community and Emergency communications

The use of amateur radio can be used to support the community in times of need.

Emergency communications

When, and not if, a natural disaster strikes, our communications infrastructure will experience immense stress, and perhaps fail at times.

Taking the Christchurch earthquake as an example, the cellular network was initially jammed, then continued running using power sources maintained manually. Many landlines were broken and roads blocked or flooded. At times like these amateur radio can step into the void.



In the past, HF communication links were used to keep areas of disaster, such as the 1931 Napier earthquake, connected to the world. Following this the amateur radio community formed the Amateur Radio Emergency Corps (AREC), which continues today. As radio amateurs we can now make VHF and UHF repeaters more predictable than relying HF skywave, and most of our installations are supported by battery power supplies.

Community services

In addition to emergencies, ad hoc radio communications can be put to use in other areas of community support. Sports events, races and rallies all need long distance communications in places when none normally exist.

Also, AREC are often called upon to provide backup communications in searches for missing persons, both in urban and mountainous environments.

AREC

Now called the Amateur Radio Emergency Communications, the AREC groups around the country are "staffed" by volunteer ham radio operators. As a licensed amateur, you are invited to assist your local group and take part in their training exercises. To find out more information, use the list on the NZART website, see below, to locate your nearest group and contact details for the group leader.



Equipment

Yes, having your own handheld radio will come in useful when taking part in events, but each AREC group is also well prepared with a wide variety of other equipment. This will give you the opportunity to gain experience in many other modes and radio bands.



Further information

- The NZART website pages <http://www.nzart.org.nz/arec/>
- List of AREC officers <http://arec.info/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/AREC-OFFICERS-2016-2017-1.pdf>