

Central Division News & Views

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2003 - A Very Interesting Year

First The Good...

There is an ancient Confucian curse that loosely translated says, "May you live in interesting times." 2003 has indeed been very interesting for the amateur radio community. WRC-2003 brought a partial restoration of the 40 meter spectrum allocation we lost right after World War II. Granted we did not lose this spectrum in our region. But night propagation has been bringing us shortwave broadcast interference from other areas. Hopefully, this will disappear from an additional 100 KHz segment by 2007.

WRC-2003 also did away with the international requirement to have Morse code capability included as part of the amateur radio licensing requirements. This requirement is now a national option. Here in the U.S., the FCC has received numerous petitions asking for the elimination, or the changing, of Morse code licensing requirements. The ARRL has yet to make any recommendation to the FCC and the Commission does not appear to be in any hurry to make changes. It remains to be seen if the ARRL board will approve an FCC petition at its January 2004 meeting.

Then The Bad ?...

The FCC is considering relaxing Part 15 device limitations for use in what it calls Broadband over Power Lines (BPL). If fully implemented on a nation-wide commercial basis, BPL will create massive interference for all licensed services using the RF spectrum from 2 to 80 MHz. BPL is now being demonstrated in several locations around the U.S. and plans to expand a couple of these sites into a full-scale commercial operation are being made. No FCC action is required to do this. Relaxed Part 15 Rules would make it easier to expand BPL systems, but BPL can be used under the present rules.

Part 15 Regulations were created in the 1930's. But the technology available then made it expensive to produce these devices. With the advent of transistors, then micro and now nano-electronic circuits, the age of "throw away" electronics is here and Part 15 devices are becoming ubiquitous. Part 15 devices used to be a nuisance comparable to having one or two crickets in the house. However, licensed RF users will soon be dealing with the noise created by a plague of crickets in the community house. Each of these devices will put out very tiny amounts of RF energy. But when many millions of these devices are present in metropolitan areas, the RF noise floor will rise and create all sorts of problems for licensed RF users.

And Now The Ugly...

Under FCC Chairman Michael Powell's leadership, the FCC is considering a concept called "noise temperature" to be used in future deliberations and rulings. Regardless of what it's called, the underlying rationale is to enable greatly increased use of unlicensed RF devices in the future. It appears the current set of Commissioners are willing to risk massive RF interference in their drive to greatly expand the use of the finite RF spectrum. The potential for rendering this spectrum useless to all users exists in this regulatory bias. The Commissioners have to realize they cannot violate basic RF Physics and still have useable RF communications.

How Do We Prevent This Regulatory Catastrophe?

In our efforts to get PRB-1 extended to cover property use conditions, covenants, and restrictions (CC&Rs), the FCC has told us to take this issue up with Congress. If Congress orders the FCC to extend PRB-1 to cover CC&Rs it has said it will do so immediately. Therefore the ARRL is expending time and money to educate U.S. Senators and Representatives on this, and related issues. As most of you already know, this has resulted in proposed bills in the House of Representatives for the last two years. This is a time-consuming, patient process that will bear fruit if we keep at it and get more people involved. This same process will probably have to be used for the BPL issue, if the FCC eventually approves Part 15 device limits relaxation for BPL use.

With this, and other important amateur radio issues, in mind; ARRL leadership has been working on a strategic plan this past year. Two consultant-led, work sessions of directors and officers have produced a 10 year plan that should be formally approved at the January board meeting. This plan signals major changes in ARRL goals. It's a safe bet to say ARRL will be far more proactive on many issues in the future, if this plan is followed.

One of our goals is to establish grass-roots contact groups in every Congressional district. These groups will become the basis for organizing coordinated contacts with elected officials in their respective areas. This is not a one-shot effort. We must develop an on-going structure to reach out to our elected officials on issues of vital importance to the Amateur Radio Service. If we fail in this effort, all our internal squabbles over RF sub-band usage, Morse code requirements, public communications service organizations, etc., will become meaningless.

Over the past two years, I have been gradually expanding the number of *Assistant Directors* in all three Central Division states (ARRL Sections). These people will be the nucleus of this contact group structure. If you know lots of people, truly enjoy meeting new people, are not afraid of speaking before groups, and have the time to help in this process, please contact me.

Hamfest Visits & Meetings

Here is my ARRL travel schedule for the next three months. It is subject to change if required ARRL meeting dates were to be changed.

Jan 3	West Allis RAC Hamfest	Waukesha, WI
Jan 14-18	ARRL Board Meeting	Windsor Locks, CT
Jan 25	Wheaton Hamfest	Saint Charles, IL
Mar 28	North Shore RC Hamfest	Grays Lake, IL

I hope to see many of you at these hamfests. In addition to shopping for new and used equipment, they are a great way to renew and develop friendships and to meet some of the voices you have heard on your radios.

73 - George R. (Dick) Isely, W9GIG
Central Division Director