

## When power is out, 'hams' pipe up

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BY MARY BETH LANE

THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

As surely as snow and ice storms will descend and knock out power, the Red Cross will provide emergency help again this year with a big hand from the radio "hams."

"Absolutely, yes," said Carol Freshour, emergency-services director at the Fairfield County chapter of the American Red Cross, which also serves Hocking County.

"Amateur-radio people are just the best."

The ham-radio operators relay messages and help when all else fails in our high-tech world.

Last January, members of the Hocking Valley Amateur Radio Club helped out in Hocking County when an ice storm knocked out power and nothing worked properly, including cell phones.

The group, which has about 25 members, set up its equipment at an emergency shelter the Red Cross opened at Logan-Hocking Middle School and relayed messages from the shelter to other ham-radio operators at the county's emergency operations center in downtown Logan.

The radio volunteers at the shelter also relayed information about shelter occupancy and food and bedding needs to Lancaster, where seven of the approximately 90 members of the Lancaster and Fairfield County Amateur Radio Club operated their radios and passed on the communications to the Red Cross office.

"They were a lifesaver," Freshour said. Without them, "we couldn't have talked to our volunteers in the shelter about what they needed, how they were doing."

Brian Mason, Richard Martin and other club members took turns at the radio.

For a ham, that was what it is all about, said Mason, who drills with other club members for such emergencies.



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**Richard Martin of Logan mans the amateur radio at Logan-Hocking Middle School in Hocking County.**

"It was really neat how it all worked," he said. "We used the radio, and it never failed us, not even for a minute. This is what hams do. If there's an emergency, we go all-out."

Of the state's 88 counties, 80 have amateur-radio clubs, said Kelli Blackwell, a spokeswoman for the Ohio Emergency Management Agency. Franklin and Cuyahoga counties are among the larger counties with multiple clubs.

Hams must pass an exam to receive a Federal Communications Commission license to operate. There are more than 660,000 amateur-radio operators in the United States.

"The amateur-radio operators are very, very helpful and always come in to help during emergencies," Blackwell said.

Nationwide, ham radio kept New York City agencies in touch on Sept. 11, 2001, and provided vital communication during Hurricane Katrina in 2005, according to the American Radio Relay League, the national organization for amateur radio.

Like the Hocking County hams, members of the Lancaster and Fairfield County club are prepared to help again this winter.

"If we get another severe storm, we'll definitely have people involved to provide communications," said club President George Lambert. "We'll be ready."

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