

Volume

2

ALBEMARLE AMATEUR RADIO CLUB

Activities Guide

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Just what are “Activities”, Anyway?

The dictionary definition and the Amateur Radio definition just aren't the same... are they?

Activities are defined in the dictionary as the plural of activity and it is defined in several ways. One is, *The state of being active*. That's a good one - hopefully most of our Amateur Radio pursuits cause us to be *active*. Another is *Energetic action or movement; liveliness*. Yes indeed, we're getting close. One especially pertinent to ham radio is *The intensity of a radioactive source*. Here's a good one, a two-part definition **a.** *A specified pursuit in which a person partakes.* **b.** *An educational process or procedure intended to stimulate learning through actual experience.* Ah ha! *this* is what we really mean by 'activities'!

Many of the things a ham does in the radio hobby could be considered activities, but in the Albemarle Amateur Radio Club, it gets to mean something more specific. A long time ago some really smart people figured out that the best way to prepare for something, to get ready for some activity, was to practice at it a while. The more you practiced, the better you got at it. Now, that's not rocket science, it makes a lot of sense. OK, though, how do you prepare, or *practise*, for something that happens rarely (hopefully), like a natural disaster such as a hurricane or train wreck or earthquake? If you live in an area where these things happen a lot, you might naturally get enough practice to learn to be good in these situations (although folks might wonder *why* you would want to live in a place like that). But thankfully, most of us live in areas where these things don't happen too often. Albemarle County is one of those fortunate places.

So what the hams do in the Albemarle County area to practice for the special events is to participate in a lot of events that are not only a lot less terrifying, but a lot more fun. We call these events activities. Our activities cover a lot of event types. Many are public service events, such as parades or walkathons. Some are bicycle races or horse races. We even do practice emergency drills. What all of these events have in common is that they use us Amateurs as communications resources to some degree.

What this manual attempts to do is to describe some of the activities, what to expect while you're in one and how to prepare for them. What it tries *not* to do is to make preparing for an event seem like a complicated task, suitable only for a special few - because participating in these activities is for *everyone*. There are no minimum requirements for participation. You don't even have to be a ham (although we will tend to focus on that - after all, we *are* a radio club) to help at an event.

The guidelines in this manual are suggestions that will make your experience a bit more comfortable and enjoyable, but are not meant to be thought of as *necessary* or *required*.

So, when the character with the clipboard wanders by and asks if you are interested in helping at an activity, sign up! You will find it a rewarding experience.

Types of Activities

Although there are many different names for the events, there are really only a few types of activities, as far as we hams are concerned, and our participation in these activities can be categorized as a few basic roles. And with a few basic roles, there are some guidelines that apply to all activities.

For All Activities

Some things are common to all activities. Each event requires a fair amount of planning where maps are made, routes are planned and assignments are made ahead of time to avoid confusion. In order to keep things running as smoothly as possible, check out these suggestions.

- Sign up early - when the clipboard makes it's rounds, try to sign up well in advance of the event. Sure, things are pretty dynamic these days and you may not be sure of your schedule that far ahead of time, but if that's the case, indicate that you *might* be interested in participating.
- Look for details about the event - if the time is drawing near and you haven't heard anything from the organizer, call them and get some information. Usually, maps and assignment sheets are mailed out well ahead of time of the event.
- If you can't make it to an event, let the organizer know - The earlier you let the event organizer know about an absence, the easier it is to make adjustments. A great help is to find your own replacement!
- Show up on time - Sometimes there are last minute changes in the Plan (this is definitely an understatement...) and changes to the assignments, frequencies, operating modes, etc. need to be made. If you're there early, you have time to adjust.
- Have fun! - these activities are designed to help us all prepare for The Big One, but that's no reason to keep from having a good time. Watch the horses or bicycles or runners or whatever. See what other hams are doing in their respective roles. Consider what role you might like to try next time. Read the User's Manual on your radio and find out what *cross band repeating* really means! (Just kidding, Hein...) Everyone who has been to a public service activity has brought home a bit of knowledge. It's amazing how much fun you can have learning something.

These are fairly general guidelines, that can be applied to just about any event. There are a number of specialties, though, that give you an opportunity for variety.

PUBLIC SERVICE ACTIVITIES

Specific Activities

Bike Races

- Road Races
- Time Trials
- Criterion

Bike Tours

- MS150
- Harvest Tour

Walks

- Diabetes
- Heart Walk
- MS

Emergency Drills

- Airport
- Hospitals
- Shelters
- County

Horse Races

- Montpelier
- Wilton

Triathlons

- Lake Monticello

Boating Events

PUBLIC SERVICE ACTIVITIES

- Boat Races
- Batteau Races

Civil War Re-enactments

About the Various Roles

Generally, the role you play at an activity is determined by the degree you will be expected to move. There are moving roles and stationary roles. The moving roles can be broken up into three types - Shadow, Rider and Mobile. The stationary roles usually fall into two categories - Portable and Vehicle. A well prepared kit will allow a ham to participate in several of these roles, and a good number of our local club members come ready to do them all. It's not that hard to be Ready for Anything.

The Shadow

At some big events, like bike-a-thons or horse races, where there is a lot of ground to cover, there is a need for a ham to follow a Very Important Person. Just like the literal shadow this person casts, the job of the Shadow ham is to follow this person around and provide personal communications. It's a good idea to bring along gear that can be stuffed in pockets. Be ready to do a lot of running. Always keep an eye on your VIP. In crowds it can be easy to lose them! Generally this role requires an HT and a good pair of running shoes. Be ready to provide third party communications because they usually want to talk on the radio themselves, so a speaker mic is a good addition to the Shadow's kit.

The Rider

Here's a fun role. The Rider is a ham that rides in someone else's vehicle and provides mobile communications. Lots of times a Rider ends up in the front seat of a police car, but sometimes works in a JAUNT van or even a dump truck! Bring along mobile gear, be ready for a long ride without stops and watch out for vehicles with aluminum or plastic roofs (unless your mag mount antenna has a plastic magnet).

The Mobile

One of the easiest to prepare for, but one of the most demanding, is the role of the Mobile ham. A mobile ham is one that rides in their own vehicle, so you can use your own radio gear, antenna and other custom equipment. You don't have to worry if your power cable fits in the cigarette lighter and you know that your coffee cup fits in the cup holder. On the other hand, you may be asked to follow a bunch of bicyclists around a small circular track a LOT of times while talking on the radio, taking notes and avoiding potholes. Sometimes you'll need to make room in the front seat for a race official. Bring duct tape and magic markers, because the folks we're working with love to put signs on The Mobile. Big paper signs that flap a lot unless they're taped down with a lot of that wonderful invention, duct tape. Pick a brand that doesn't take off the vehicle's finish...

Portable Fixed

This role is a lot like the Shadow's, except not much running is involved. Usually the Portable Fixed ham walks to a location and then stays there for the duration of the event. Bring along a book and a few extra things for personal comfort. A lightweight folding chair is well worth the weight...

Vehicle Fixed

The Vehicle Fixed role is the classical 'station' type ham in an event. Usually a Vehicle Fixed ham is asked to drive his/her vehicle to a location and operate the station from there. This is an ideal role for those that like the comforts of their own vehicles (especially those with motor homes!) but don't like to do a lot of driving. Be sure to park within walking distance of a bathroom and get ready for a LONG stay.

Net Control

Do you like the feeling of power? Directing a spread out group of communicators to work on an event? Then maybe you ought to consider being Net Control. The Net Control ham coordinates the communication during an event. They decide what type of net to run (directed, informal, etc.) and tie together all of the 'ends' of the communication net serving a particular occasion. It's exciting, and you get to see a lot of action. It also can be very demanding when four or five people are all clamoring for your attention at the same time and you need to keep track of who's doing what. Usually the Net Control is a fixed station, but on occasion they are mobile. The most important tools needed are a pad and pencil and a nice, quiet place to operate. Net Controllers work best when they have a helper to go for things and provide an interface to the event officials.

The Disclaimer

These roles are not all inclusive and just as soon as they are written down someone will invent another type. They should, however, cover a lot of the types of events seen at most of our Club's public service activities.

The checklists that follow were compiled from lists provided by hams that have participated in the types of events listed above. They are meant to provide a convenient way of remembering what handy things to bring to an activity. They are also meant to be added to and changed as necessary as you get more involved in participating in these activities, because everybody does it differently.

The authors of this little booklet would very much like to hear from you and learn about your experiences, in the hopes that we can update this Guide and make it even more helpful to those just starting out.

We enjoy participating in these activities a LOT, and hope you will too.

N4PGS N4FWA K4DND

Checklists

The following pages show detailed checklists of equipment for the particular type of role outlined in the previous narrative. They also indicate, where applicable, hints and suggestions that various hams have discovered while performing these roles. Use them as suggestions - there is no *right* list for everybody. Your list will be longer or shorter depending upon your needs.

The Shadow

Radio gear

- HT
- Spare batteries or battery packs
- Speaker/mic
 - Earphone or headset
 - Good, flexible antenna

Comfort

Walking shoes or boots
Rain gear
Head and neck covering
medication
tissues
sun glasses
snacks
dress in layers - keep warm!

Miscellaneous

Reflective vest
notepad
pens/pencils
Money (change for calls and vending machines)
flashlight
maps
aspirin/Tylenol
band-aids
watch
rubber bands
garbage bag
Swiss Army knife

Remember, don't get *too* much of anything! Too cold, too hot, too wet or too tired. All of these cause problems. Dress appropriately for the weather, because it seems like a lot of our activities are held outside. Watch out for that wind chill! Even on a nice sunny day, the wind can rob your body of a LOT of heat. Wear a hat and plenty of layers of clothes. Don't forget scarves and gloves, either.

The Rider

Radio gear

- HT or mobile rig
- Spare batteries or battery packs
- Speaker/mic
- Earphone or headset
- Mag mount antenna
- Power adapters for cigarette lighter plug

Also, be careful of equipment needs in this role. It may not always be easy to stick a mag mount on a non-metallic vehicle body and sometimes the distance from your rig to the nearest cigarette lighter is the length of your power cable plus six inches. It never hurts to bring along a couple of battery packs, or even a nice big power station.

Comfort

- Rain gear
- Head and neck covering
- medication
- tissues
- sun glasses
- snacks
- dress in layers - keep warm!

Miscellaneous

- Reflective vest
- notepad
- pens/pencils
- Money (change for calls and vending machines)
- flashlight
- maps
- aspirin/Tylenol
- band-aids
- watch
- rubber bands
- garbage bag
- Swiss Army knife

Take the opportunity to let someone else do the driving while you relax and play radio. Just make sure that you follow the rules of the captain of the vessel (the vehicle you are riding in). If you get even the slightest bit carsick, bring along some Dramamine!

The Mobile

Radio gear

- a mobile rig, of course!
- Spare batteries or battery packs
- Speaker/mic
- Radio tool kit
- Whatever other good stuff you already installed

Comfort

- a good seat cushion
- Rain gear
- Head and neck covering
- medication
- tissues
- sun glasses
- snacks
- cooler or Thermos full of your favorite
- dress in layers - keep warm!

Miscellaneous

- Reflective vest
- notepad
- pens/pencils
- Money (change for calls and vending machines)
- flashlight
- maps
- aspirin/Tylenol
- band-aids
- watch
- rubber bands
- garbage bag
- Swiss Army knife

Vehicle

- Got enough gas?
- Tire pressure
- All the lights working?
- Amateur Radio signs (of course!)
- Tool kit

Always be a good, defensive driver. Keep your eyes on the road, NOT on the radio dial, unless you are safely stopped! Watch out for pedestrians or bicyclists. If you ride with a bike race official, and he wants you to get *real* close to the pack, use your common sense. Drive first, use your radio second. Always obey the instructions of any law enforcement officer first - no race official or VIP outranks a policeman on the street, when you are driving. Use your emergency flashers if approved. Make sure you can be seen, from in front and behind. This is a good role to have some help with - it can be a lot of fun for another ham (acting as a Rider) to help out a Mobile ham. And remember, we are communicators first - not taxi drivers or short haul truckers. Listen to the Net Control and have fun.!

Portable Fixed

Radio gear

HT

Spare batteries or battery packs

Speaker/mic

Earphone or headset

Good, flexible antenna

Comfort

Walking shoes or boots

Rain gear

Head and neck covering

medication

tissues

sun glasses

snacks

dress in layers - keep warm!

Miscellaneous

Reflective vest

notepad

pens/pencils

Money (change for calls and vending machines)

flashlight

maps

aspirin/Tylenol

band-aids

watch

rubber bands

garbage bag

Swiss Army knife

small folding chair

reading material

insect repellent

Vehicle Fixed

Radio gear

- Mobile radio
- Spare batteries or battery packs
- Speaker/mic
- Extra connectors for antenna, etc.
- Mag mount antenna

Comfort

- Seat cushion
- Rain gear
- Head and neck covering
- medication
- tissues
- sun glasses
- snacks
- dress in layers - keep warm!

Miscellaneous

- Reflective vest
- notepad
- pens/pencils
- Money (change for calls and vending machines)
- flashlight
- maps
- aspirin/Tylenol
- band-aids
- watch
- rubber bands
- garbage bag
- baggies
- Swiss Army knife
- Duct tape
- Magic markers
- cooler
- paper towels
- reading material
- insect repellent

Vehicle

- Got enough gas?
- Tire pressure
- All the lights working?
- Bungee straps
- Amateur Radio signs (of course!)

Always obey the rules of the road and park in a safe place. It is YOUR responsibility to make sure you are safely parked. Only a law enforcement officer can direct you to park in a normally restricted parking place. Don't block private drives or access roads and always be ready to move your vehicle. If you are parked for a long time and using your radio, periodically check to see if you can start your car. Some of these mobile rigs are real power hogs!

Glossary

SAG

Sweep

Station

Mechanic

Roam

Wheel Car

Net Control

Rescue

Lead

Tactical Calls

Criterion

Time Trials

Rolling Closure

Batteau

Radio

Battery

Activity

Ham

Triathlon

Walkathon

Drill Disaster

Cross Band Repeating

Morse Code