

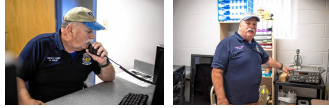
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## Granite Geek: If all else fails, there's amateur radio



Deputy chief Robert Farley talks to a fellow "ham radio" operator from the command center at the Pembroke Fire Dept. on Monday. GEOFF FORESTER / Monitor staff » [Buy this Image](#)



By DAVID BROOKS

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Monitor staff

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If you want to rile up a fan of amateur radio, a.k.a. “ham radio,” here’s what to do: Say that cell phones make them unnecessary.

“That is the most common misconception. People say, what do we need radio for? We have cell phones!” said Rob Farley, deputy fire chief in Pembroke, when I put forward this suggestion. To be fair, he sounded more exasperated than riled up.

Farley has heard this comment more than once as head of the area Amateur Radio Emergency Services for the capital region. The group coordinates the use of amateur radio during emergencies when other forms of communication may fall short.

The drawback to cell phones if something like a big ice storm takes out everybody’s power and internet connection isn’t the hardware, Farley said. It’s the network.

“If you have an emergency, everybody goes to the cellphone and it gets completely blocked because too many people are trying to push it through that small pipe,” he said. He pointed to 9-1-1 as the canonical example: So many New Yorkers tried to call as the towers fell that it was hard to get through.

“When you’re doing emergency planning, don’t rely on cell phones,” he said. “They’re going to be one of the first things to go.”

Amateur radio, on the other hand, is incredibly robust. Even a semi-experienced operator with so-so equipment can connect over long distances using nothing more than a car battery for power and a wire tossed over a tree limb as an antenna, and there’s no chance the radio frequency will get too full. If you know

Morse code – a skill no longer required to get a broadcast license, to the dismay of some old-timers – you can send and receive information despite a signal-to-noise ratio that would reduce an audiophile to tears.

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That's why New Hampshire's State Emergency Center has amateur radio equipment and the Division of Emergency Services and Communications has established a process for volunteers to be used for communications. Amateur radio is also part of FEMA's national emergency preparedness guidelines.

“FEMA really wants all the emergency operations centers to have a backup and they consider amateur radio a viable backup,” said Skip Camejo, public information coordinator for the state section of the Amateur Radio Relay League. ARRL's slogan is “when all else fails, there's amateur radio.”

There are 5,698 current amateur radio licenses in New Hampshire, according to Camejo, out of more than 833,000 nationwide. Equipment ranges from walkie-talkie-ish sets you hold in your hand to base operations that run to five figures or more. There are ways to connect amateur radio and the internet, and even ways to tie into repeaters with one of those darned cell phones.

This weekend I suspect a sizable chunk of our 5,698 operators will be part of the annual Field Day, a national event in which operators all over the country set up equipment and antennas outdoors for a public demonstration of how the system works, including how far signals can go by bouncing off the ionosphere.

“I've had contact with Mongolia,” said Camejo. “Ireland, Europe, that's easy.”

Field Day events will be held this Saturday and Sunday; timing varies. There are five events in New Hampshire; the closest to Concord will be the Granite State Amateur Radio Association gathering at 972 Back Mountain Road in Goffstown. They typically have a “Get on the air” station for demonstrations and may have a transmitter hidden on the grounds for a “fox hunt” using radios to find the transmitter. For details check with William Arcand, 603-600-6469 or [w1wra@w1ra.net](mailto:w1wra@w1ra.net) (<https://mail.google.com/mail/?view=cm&fs=1&tf=1&to=w1wra@w1ra.net>).

Events will also be held in Moultonboro, Swanzey, Hudson and at the Milton Town Beach, so you can take a dip afterward.



**David Brooks** is a reporter and the writer of the sci/tech column Granite Geek and blog [granitegeek.org](http://granitegeek.org) (<http://granitegeek.org>), as well as moderator of Science Cafe Concord events. After obtaining a bachelor's degree in mathematics he became a newspaperman, working in Virginia and Tennessee before spending 28 years at the *Nashua Telegraph* . He joined the *Monitor* in 2015.

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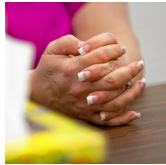
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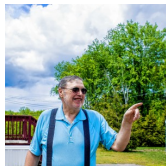


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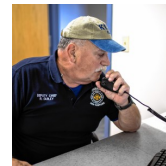
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