



Radio Club Simulates Power Outage

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By Bill Walker
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KEADY

Disaster struck the Keady area Saturday afternoon, wiping out electricity and downing all telephone lines for 24 hours.

Nobody's quite sure what particular calamity struck the area - possibly a tornado, or an earthquake, or a tire fire.

Whatever it was, Keady resident Gene McDonald and the other members of the Georgian bay Amateur Radio Club were ready with their electronic pipeline to the outside world. In fact, they were the only people in the area to notice the emergency.



The mock disaster was part of an annual field day, where ham radio operators around the world practice broadcasting for 24 hours under emergency conditions.

This means no electricity or telephones. The power used to run their radios must come either from generators, batteries, solar panels or wind.

"It sure does look like we've had a disaster or something, doesn't it" McDonald said Sunday, surveying his cluttered yard.

"But that's exactly the point of this simulation. This is exactly what we'd do in an emergency. Set up a command centre and start broadcasting."

McDonald's front yard looked like a war zone Sunday, with tents scattered across the grass and antenna's sprouting from the lawn like thin saplings.

About 22 club members camped out at McDonald's from 2 p.m. Saturday until 2 p.m. Sunday. Many slept in tents or trailers, others huddled in sleeping bags against the cool evening temperatures.

But mainly the hunched around six shortwave radio's sending signals to the earth's four corners.

As part of the annual field day, the amateur radio operators keep track of every different operator they come in contact with. The operators, or groups, get points for each contact they make.

And while there aren't any prizes for the groups with the most points, certificates are awarded by the American Radio Relay League to each operator taking part in the event. "We have about 350 responses from all over the world," club president Tom St.Amand said. "We contacted operators in Hawaii, Alaska, Bulgaria. We even talked with a fellow in Australia last night. We could hear him clear as day, his accent and all."

While ham radio operators are considered by most to be hobbyists, they're often the only means of communication when an area is hit by disaster.

Amateur radio operators were instrumental in passing messages from such events as the Mississauga train disaster, the San Fransisco Earthquake and the Hagersville tire fire.

"We don't get paid for anything we do, so you really have to like people," St.Amand said.

"You just have to realize that one day someone may do the same thing for you. It's almost like seeing a little old lady with a flat tire. You would stop and help her"