Getting Started in Neighborhood HamWatch

Since Neighborhood HamWatch is a service program for individual amateur radio operators and not a club or organization, getting started is homebrew… you do it all by yourself. Here are some ideas to help you.*

1. Participating in NHW means getting yourself ready to communicate using your amateur radio during long periods of time when the power is out. What do you need to do that?

Batteries – You don't necessarily need to keep your equipment up and running 24-7, but you will need enough amps to operate a minimum of an hour a day. For the most part commercial electricity is restored within 21 days even after a major disaster. But you never know for certain how long the demand for your services will be. It's best to also invest in some means to keep your batteries charged.

Recharging Capability – Solar, wind, or a gasoline-powered generator would likely ensure you could keep a reasonable supply of batteries charged up enough to accommodate a relatively infinite duration of service.

2. Then what do you need?

Somebody To Talk To—If you have a ham friend that you usually chew the rag with, you are ready to break the silence barrier when the power goes out. It would be really great if your buddy would volunteer for Neighborhood HamWatch service as well, then you'll both know you will be there for each other and your neighbors when the time comes.

A Place To Meet-- Decide what 2M simplex frequency you will use. Remember that staying simplex keeps you out of everyone else's way and that's important. You don't want to depend upon a repeater or net that may become unavailable to serve you due to the needs of the overall emergency situation. If you haven't a set frequency and a known ham to contact, you can always make a call on the national simplex calling frequency 146.520.   Once you find a contact, arrange to move to a mutually agreed frequency that will serve your NHW needs. Consult local repeater coordinators to ensure that you do not inadvertently utilize a frequency that is also used as a repeater input or output frequency. It is not acceptable operating procedure to use the national simplex calling frequency except to make an initial contact and arrange another frequency for your purposes.

Accomplishing this step achieves the first value of Neighborhood HamWatch, and that is to break the silence barrier and connect with other people with whom you can share helpful information.

Find out what frequencies your local government EOC uses for their amateur station. They will use repeaters as well as simplex channels. Hopefully the amateur radio station in your local EOC is operated by an ARES® member, who like you, is a volunteer. Although some EOC

amateur radio stations are operated by full-time employees of the city or county who have FCC amateur radio licenses. Monitor these frequencies for helpful information that you can relay to your neighbors.

3. Communicating with your local government Emergency Managers.

A concept of Neighborhood HamWatch is to stay local, serving your immediate neighbors and relaying helpful information between them and their local government emergency response managers.

To accomplish this, you need to coordinate ahead of time with your local government Emergency Manager. He/she may refer you to the operator of the EOC's amateur radio station, and/or the ARRL Emergency Coordinator responsible through ARRL channels for ARES® voluntary communication support. Explain the program to them, use the website for reference (www.hamwatch.me) and establish a frequency they will monitor that will allow you contact them with helpful information about your neighborhood.   We have yet to identify an Emergency Manager who does not recognize the benefit of an active network of Neighborhood HamWatch amateur radio operators with whom they can relay information that would help them manage the emergency response.

Accomplishing this step achieves the second value of the Neighborhood HamWatch program, to relay information to and from your neighbors and local government emergency management responsible for responding to the emergency.

4. Add E-mail Capability To Your Station—WINLINK 2000 provides you with the opportunity to send and receive Email messages over the Internet without the need of connecting to the Internet with a standard provider. You connect your computer to the Internet using your amateur radio instead of using a phone line, satellite, cable, or other standard provider.

This permits you a high degree of reliability by removing your dependence upon commercial service providers who will likely be suffering from the emergency condition as well.

Achieving Email capability accomplishes the third value of Neighborhood HamWatch, which is to be able to send short Emails to friends and family of your neighbor's at their specific request, without burdening the National Traffic System with an excessive number of non-emergency traffic.

*NOTE: Some amateur radio clubs and ARES® groups are taking the lead in recruiting Neighborhood HamWatch volunteers to help in the emergency communication effort. It is an ideal program for those who are unable to deploy during emergencies but still desire to be of assistance. And NHW volunteers act as a "force multiplier" by augmenting the saturation and range of amateur communication capability benefiting local government emergency managers.