

Talking points for outdoor enthusiasts

For hikers and back country campers:

- One backcountry camper said: “The blessing of uncluttered mental space is no longer a function of remoteness but of desire: to bring the sat phone or to leave it. To use it or to keep it in the emergency pouch. To stay connected or to cut the cord.” The same can be said of radio communications, however... emergencies occur.
- With cellular, you can check the coverage maps for the area you'll be in. If the maps show that your area is covered, then you'll probably be able to get a telephone-quality connection to a regional 911 emergency center. Just make sure you know EXACTLY where you are; with a cell phone, the guy on the other end probably won't have a clue (although some technical changes in the cell phone system are being proposed which will reduce the problem to some extent). Of course, the coverage maps may be optimistic, or you may be in a location that prevents you from making a connection for some reason or another.
- Hams like to put VHF and UHF repeaters up in the strangest places; there's a CHANCE the area you're in may have excellent coverage. Like cellular, the coverage areas for the repeaters are pretty well defined; it just may be a little trickier to find out what they are. Systems like APRS give operators up to date knowledge of where people and resources are, and good prior planning can help in identifying what communications resources are available to which points. (APRS could be a difficult concept to discuss with people when you start talking about GPS receivers, TNCs, and other acronyms associated with the system. APRS is really easy to explain if you compare the system to trailing the bad guy in a James Bond film. Everyone gets that and also has some great wow factor to it. If you have a live internet connection, this is something you can demonstrate live through the findu.com website. Just be sure to have an APRS volunteer out driving around the town.)
- CB channel 19, which is supposed to be reserved for emergency communications, is often overrun. Also, any CB radio you can carry around with you will probably not have a particularly good antenna, so your effective communications range may be limited. Full power CB "hand held" radios are usually quite large and heavy. There also might not be anybody listening on the other end, or the people who DO hear you might be 2000 miles away (CB can do that sometimes).
- Unlike CB, you do need an FCC licence to use ham radio. A motivated individual can get on the air with a minimum of hassle (like no Morse code requirement, for example). A decent VHF or UHF transceiver will set you back a couple of hundred dollars and will be the same size as a cell phone (or smaller). Unlike the cell phone, there's no monthly service charge, nor any per-minute charges. Depending on your personality, you may enjoy ham radio as a hobby all by itself.

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- There's an emergency wilderness protocol, monitor a specific frequency for five minutes at the top of each hour, announcing your presence once or twice during that time. In moderately populated areas with spotty repeater coverage it actually seems to work pretty well. It also enforces a 5-10 minute break each hour, which is a good general habit.

For any outdoor audience:

- In a true emergency, the ham community will go overboard to lend you a hand, contact emergency services, etc the biggest advantage of ham radio is one cellular phones will never be able to touch. On any repeater, you can plug into a network of local knowledge immediately and easily. And if the local hams know you're out there, that's another group of people who know to miss you if you vanish. Try to get that kind of connection with a phone.
- If there is a natural disaster, as soon as the press and the gawkers get there, the cell phone links are going to be flooded.
- A radio in the woods is a good idea but don't depend on it just like you wouldn't depend on any other piece of equipment. Always have another out.

For RV'ers:

- RV'ers use handhels to keep in touch while traveling in caravans, to assist backing into a campsite, etc. Of course FRS or CB's can also be used for these purposes. The use of repeaters extends range. Despite many attempts, FRS and CB are not well suited to calling for assistance in an emergency.
- HF works well to keep in touch over long distances. The Wally Bynum RV Club (Airstream), Family Motorcoach Association, and Good Sam all hold HF nets for RV'ers. Folks frequently check into the RV service net on 14.307.5 M-F at noon and 5 PM Eastern. There are also national and regional HF nets for RVer's and mobile (family auto) amateurs.

For mountain and rock climbers:

- Climbers are a little "out there," so you would want to tell them about ham radio involvement in disasters and emergencies, like search and rescues. Stuff to get their adrenaline flowing. Climbers are adrenaline junkies! Much communication during the climb is via hand signals and rope tugging, however if a rescue is needed you have to be able to contact the "outside world."

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For Kayakers, Canoeists and Boaters

While most waterways traveled by commercial vessels are well covered and served by marine VHF radio, many of the inland waterways that attract kayakers and folks with small boats have no network of vessels and relay facilities for marine VHF radios. The U.S. Coast Guard coordinates all emergency services provided to marine radios, and they monitor the ocean coasts, the Great Lakes, and the navigable Western rivers, such as the Mississippi and Columbia. However, no one monitors marine VHF bands on the rivers, lakes or streams that are popular inland kayaking and canoeing areas. The range of a marine VHF radio is similar to a 2-meter ham HT and is useful for kayak-to-kayak/canoe-to-canoe communication, but there are no marine VHF repeaters—powerful automatic relay stations that retransmit your signal over a wide area.

Regulations prohibit the use of a marine VHF radio while on land. In most cases, the Coast Guard will simply tell you to call the local police on a land line and to get off the marine bands if you are on land. The VHF radio network, in areas where it is used, works well in situations where lives or boats are threatened, but the Coast Guard will not relay a message except in emergencies. If you're lucky, you may find a boater willing to relay a message, but you shouldn't count on using the VHF network this way.