



The Zero Beat

NEXT MEETING

March 8, 2006
7:00 P.M.
Hoover Elementary
School
23720 Hoover Ave.
Hazel Park

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MARCH MEETING

The Blackout of 2003 was a great learning experience for ARES groups across the Great Lakes areas including Oakland County ARPSC. We found out just what we needed to improve. One of the areas that needed improvement was the hospital communication system with the County.

The amateur radio transceiver recommended for county hospitals is the ICOM 2720. Plans are to have 4 or so hams cover each hospital and would be sent there to become familiar with the equipment, its location, and actually operate the amateur radio.

Bill Bond, W8WRB, member of HPARC will discuss Oakland County's Hospital Emergency Network, and give a brief overview of the operations and the need for volunteers at certain hospitals within the county.

PRESIDENT'S MONTHLY QRM

We are starting to move into the busy season for amateur radio. The last week in April we have the March of Dimes walk, to help at, and the First Weekend in May we have the MS walk in Birmingham to occupy our time. Of course the Oak apple run is going to be in the first weekend in June.

While we are thinking about June, the Hazel Park Schools has approved our club to hold Field Day at the Hazelwood property again this year. We need a couple of volunteers to oversee field day, so if you are inclined let us know. We also need someone to handle the banquet in June. There is something to keep everyone busy, that is what makes this club great - a lot of good people pitching in and getting things done.

If you are looking for something to do on Saturday afternoons once a month,

see John K8UP. He is running the siren nets again this year and is always looking for someone to check a siren. Just a quick reminder - the sky warn classes are being held this month, if you have never attended one give it a look; even if you don't get active in the sky warn program the class is very interesting.

For Dayton see Steve N8FH. he has rooms available and needs to get confirmations soon or he will have to turn them back in.

The most significant thing that you can do to help out the club is to run for one of the club offices. Anyone can run, for any of the offices; nobody has a lock on a particular chair at the meetings. So give it some thought WE NEED NEW BLOOD to help run this club and to bring in new ideas.

Very 73
 Phil AA8KR

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REPEATERS

First I have to apologize to Joe/KC8IKW, who's been going around apologizing to anyone who will listen. I mistakenly thanked him last month for assisting with the new DART South remote receive (that's a lot of adjectives right there!). Joe had talked with Don/W8PDI about building the outside enclosure, but it was actually Dan/AB8VM who did the work!

Don pointed out my error, and I want everyone to know how much the DART appreciates help from everyone. The DART relies on volunteers like Joe, Don, Dan, John/AA8UU, Murray/KE8UM, Alex/N8AJB and John/K8ZEC.

If you have suggestions for how we can make improvements—or, even better—wish to assist us with making improvements on the DART, get in touch with one us.

The South site equipment is still back at Murray's house. There's a problem with the main site not hearing the South site, and Murray thought it was an issue with the system there in Canton. Turns out the problem may be at the main site.

Here's a rough idea of what we think the problem is— Currently, we use the main 2 meter antenna to do 3 things: Receive 2 meter signals, Transmit 2 meter signals

and Receive 440 signals from the remote sites. That's a lot, right?

Unlike your transceiver, which has only to do one or the other at a time, the repeater has to transmit while simultaneously receiving your signal.

Now, we have duplexers that filter/block the transmitted 2 meter signal from the received 2 meter signal. Those are big cans that sit next to the repeater equipment rack. They seem to work pretty well (although I'd like to see them tested to make sure they haven't drifted from spec). If they didn't work right, the main site would not be able to "hear" as it transmitted, which is a problem as its a repeater. We call that desensing. Its the repeater equivalent of a bad hangover. As we pump up the power at the main site, it gets worse.

It's the third use we have a problem with. As you can imagine, using a 2 meter antenna to receive 440 is not what they call in the business world a "best practice". While its been working for the North and East receive sites, the South site location is a little too weak for it.

Murray plans to put up a separate 2M/440 vertical he has to receive the 440

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CONTEST CORNER

March:

- 4-5 International DX Contest- CW sponsored by ARRL
- 12 RTTY Sprint sponsored by NCJ
- 25-26 CQ WW WPX/CW sponsored by CQ magazine

April:

- 15 Michigan QSO Party sponsored by MRRC

May:

- 13-14 or 20-21 CQ National Fox Hunting Weekend sponsored by CQ Magazine
- 27-28 CQWW WPX/CW sponsored by CQ magazine

June:

- 10-12 June VHF QSO Party sponsored by ARRL
- 24-25 Field Day sponsored by ARRL

NETS

Oakland County Amateur Radio Public Service Corp (ARPSC)

Every Thursday at 8 pm on 145.250 MHz/100pl With a Hospital Radio Net on the 4th Thursday of each month
Web Site: [Http://www.qsl.net/w8oak](http://www.qsl.net/w8oak)

Sunday Night 2-meter Phone Net

Every Sunday at 9:00 PM local time, (146.64 (-), no PL at net time) catch up on club news and information, and just to keep in touch. All amateurs are welcome to check in.

NTS Traffic Nets (Alternate location)

the Southeast Michigan National Traffic System (NTS) net Normally held every night at 10:15 PM local time on 145.33. Net manager is Diane, WI8K.

Rocking Chair Net

You don't have to be confined to a rocking chair to check in! A friendly group meets on 145.630 MHz simplex (FM phone) at 8:00 PM local time, weekdays + some Saturdays. Net control is usually Bill, N8QVS, or Bill, KB8NIH, both of whom are located in Royal Oak.

Wolverine Net

The 75 Meter Wolverine Net meets on 3935 KC (LSB phone) daily at 7:00 PM local time with pre-net starting at about 6:30 PM. The nets start a half hour earlier in winter. Joe, K8JRE jc6otry@moa.net or Ed, KA8NCH ed@ellisgen.com can provide more detail.

HPARC medium speed CW net

Every Tuesday night at 8:00 PM on 28.128 MHz. AI, N8WYO, runs the net and will match your speed. This is a net for folks who have mastered the 5 wpm, and want to move up to faster speeds, or if you're a little rusty.

AI calls CQHP at 8 PM sharp!

Congratulations

Sean K8KHZ is your new VHF & HF award card checker. Collect QSL cards for memories and use them doubly for awards such as WAS and VUCC. If you need help ordering QSL cards or need more information please e-mail him at k8khz@yahoo.com

2006 SIREN TESTS

Our first Oakland County Siren Test will be Saturday, March 4, 2006 at 1 pm. Check-in times to the subnets begin between 12:30–12:45 pm. Siren Testing for Severe Weather Awareness Week will be Tuesday, 28 March 2006 and amateurs are encouraged to participate.

Tests will continue on the first Saturday of each non-winter month, when Oakland county tests its tornado sirens, the ARPSC conducts nets on 2-meter repeaters and simplex channels in Oakland County, where amateurs stationed near sirens can call in and verify their proper operation.

The main net is on 145.25 /100pl (Oakland Co. ARPSC repeater); subnets are on the DART (146.64/100hz pl); 146.90 - Milford; 146.49 simplex - Farmington; 146.84 - Clarkston and 146.475 - Novi.

John, K8UP, controls the southeast Oakland County net on the DART repeater (146.64, -offset, 100hz PL), starting at 12:45 PM. Check in if you can.

If you cannot check into the DART, then check into one of the other nets and Andy will direct you to a siren to monitor. George, K8GEO, controls the northwest Oakland County net on the USECA repeater (147.18 + 100hz PL). Other siren nets are on 146.90- Milford, 146.84+ OCARS, and 146.475, Novi.

Please consider helping with this effort. Oakland County has 174 sirens, with 6 more on order. A list of siren locations is on the W8OAK website.

Note: siren tests are not conducted during December, January, and February.

The April 2000 test is cancelled due to a special test being conducted in late March.

SKYWARN TRAINING

Covert Center, Waterford
Tuesday **March 7,2006** 7:30Pm-9:30 PM

Oakland County EOC
Saturday **March 11,2006** 10:00-12:00 & 1-3

Groveland Twp Fire Department, Station #1,
Wednesday **March 15,2006** 7:00PM -9:00PM

Southfield Civic Center Library
Tuesday **March 21,2006** 6:00Pm-8:00PM

CLASSES

Testing info – Current charge is \$14. Bring current license and/or CSCE PLUS a copy of said documents, non programmable calculator (formulas stored in your head—no where else), pens, and pencils (with eraser).

Extra Classes license Class

John K8UP and Dee N8UZE are instructing an Extra Class License class that will run as long as it's needed. If you cannot make the first week, call John on 248-542-9573 and let him know. There is no charge for the class; however, you need to purchase (or borrow) the ARRL Extra Class License Manual for Radio Amateurs (Eighth Edition). ISBN: 0-87259-865-9

Oak Park Community Center , 14300 Oak Park Blvd.
Oak Park, MI 48237 248-691-7555

Class will generally be in the east end of the building by the library; a room will be provided based on building needs. Check the building board (by the office) to make sure where it is on a particular night.

Technician or General Class **NEW**

HPARC is starting a new technician class, in Sterling Heights on March 7. It will be held at fire station number 5 located on Ryan road about a half mile north of 18 mile road. If you know someone that is interested or if you want to help out; contact Richard N8MQU, John AA8UU or Don W8PDI.

Exam Help Online

Tips

<http://www.arfunk.com/amrad/passexams.html>

Practice Tests

<http://www.eham.net/exams/>

<http://www.qrz.com/testing.html>

<http://www.ah0a.org/AHOA.html>

<http://www.aa9pw.com/radio/resources.html>

Morse Code

<http://www.aa9pw.com/radio/morse.html>

Morse code trainer <http://www.g4fon.net/>

Load MP3 of code practice onto a flash drive to listen to while not at home

MINUTES

FEBRUARY 8, 2006 MEETING -

Phil AA8KR open the meeting at 7:30 PM. Roll call was next and completed. Minutes of the meeting was approved as they appeared in the Zero Beat.

The budget was presented by Rich N8MQU. Mike made inquires about the funding for the repeaters. Phil explained about the tables for the swap. We received one dollar off each table because we unloaded the tables off the truck. A motion to accept the budget as read was approved.

Phil introduced Ms. Laura Speegle a fifth grade teacher at Courville Elementary. She won a NASA Explore School grant to teach her students all about ham radio and electronics. Phil ask me to assist her in buying and installing radio equipment at the school. I, Willie KC8FNQ asked for volunteers and receive several offers. (I will keep you posted as things unfold.)

We renewed the special service club award. Ken AD8M was our guest speaker. He gave an in-depth presentation on power supplies, excellent as unusual. John K8UP announced that he and Dee N8UZE are conducting an Extra Class class at Oak Park Community Center on Tuesdays at 7 p.m. He also reported that monthly siren tests are starting beginning the 1st Saturday in March. Peter's Island is open for DX all bands frequencies.

We have one new member Robert Kelly KC8OBG.

John K8UP conducted the raffle and the meeting was adjourned.

Willie Neal KC8FNQ
Secretary, HPARC

Correction on February issue

NTS frequency is 145.33 not 146.33

Remove contact info from Contest Corner

25-26 NAQP RTTY sponsored by NCJ

page 7 correct Marsha -- not KA8SMR but KA8DMR

A R O U N D T O W N . . .

18 Mar 2006 **Crossroads Hamfest**

Southern Michigan Amateur Radio Society, Marshall, MI
Marshall High School, 701 North Marshall
<http://www.qsl.net/w8df> Talk-In: 146.660 (no tone)
Contact: Billy W. Booth, KD8CDS
Phone: 269-965-1415 Email: SQJUMPER@aol.com

19 Mar 2006 **TMRA Hamfest and Computer Show**

Toledo Mobile Radio Association, Maumee, Ohio
Lucas County Recreation Center, 2901 Key Street,
Talk In: 147.27 + (no PL-rptr in net mode) 103.5
Contact: Brian J Harrington WD8MXR
Phone : 419-535-6594
Email: bharrington@meduohio.edu

8 Apr 2006 **Milford Swap and Shop**

Milford Amateur Radio Club, Highland, MI
Milford High School
2380 Milford Road <http://www.qsl.net/w8ydk/>
Talk-In: 145.49 MHz (PL 67)
Contact: Rose Mary Moore, KC8NQJ
Phone: 810-632-5174 Email: mboard3106@aol.com

6 May 2006 **Cadillac Amateur Radio and Computer Swap**

Wexaukee Amateur Radio Club Cadillac, MI
Cadillac Junior High School
500 Chestnut Street
<http://members.fortunecity.com/wexaukee>
Talk-In: 146.98 - (no tone) Contact: Brian Polk, KC8TXT
Phone: 231-743-6860 Email: bandb@netonecom.net
W8HVG Phone: 616-455-3915 Email: abra@i2k.com

19-21 May 2006 **55th Dayton Hamvention**

Dayton ARA Trotwood, OH Hara Arena
001 Shiloh Springs Road <http://www.hamvention.org/>
Contact: Jim Nies, WX8F

3 Jun 2006 **Annual Hamfestival**

The Independent Repeater Association Hudsonville, MI
Hudsonville Fairgrounds Grant Street
<http://www.w8hvg.org>
Talk-In: 147.16 (PL 94.8)
Contact: Ray Abraczinskas, W8HVG
Phone: 616-455-3915
Email: abra@i2k.com

18 Jun 2006 **Monroe County Radio Communications**

Association Monroe, MI Monroe County Fairgrounds 3775
South Custer Road <http://www.mcrc.org/hamfest.htm>
Talk-In: 146.72/12 Contact: Fred VanDaele, KA8EBI
Phone: 734-242-9487 Email: ka8ebi@arrl.net

24 Jun 2006 **TOMARC - Field Day & Tailgate Swap**

Davis Tree Farm & Top of Michigan ARC
Elmira (Gaylord), MI Davis Tree Farm - Field Day Site
8378 Van Tyle Road 10 miles west of Gaylord
Talk-In: 146.820 (PL 118.8) & 146.52 Simplex
Contact: James E. Davis, KC8NTE
Email: KC8NTE@arrl.net

C Q D X . . .

Welcome once again to the DX deal. This month I bring to you what has been hot. This coming up month is the ARRL DX SSB Contest. 20,40, and 80M DX has been heard. Since we are at the bottom of the solar cycle 23 DX has been more prominent on 40 and 80M. Even contacts on 160M have been made more often. I have found openings on 15 and 17M occurring this summer. For the first time in a while I heard Japanese stations using the good old wire on 17M.

Why Contest in the ARRL DX contest. If you make 100 contacts and you submit your log to the ARRL you can purchase a nice pin for 7\$ to make it aware you worked 100 contacts during the contest. You can also work some DX stations that you might not have before or reunite contest style QSO with stations you have heard before. Also you can check out your station to see how well it is "getting out" or just if your microphone is working.

This month the South Eastern Michigan DX Association will have DX-Peditionare, Mike K9AJ On March 10th about his recent trips to two rare IOTA stations. Find more about SEMDXA at <http://www.semdxa.org> The meeting is free. It starts at 5:30-7PM with dinner and then the meeting will start at 7:30ish. Join us for a good meal and a great presentation.

73,
Sean K8KHZ

2006 MICHIGAN QSO PARTY

Attention Michigan Hams. Do the low sunspot numbers and worsening HF conditions have you feeling down? Do you find it difficult to conjure up the energy needed to get on the air and have some fun like in the old days? Do you shy away from participating in ham radio related group activities? If you have any one of, or all of the above symptoms, you may be suffering from Amateur Radio Dysfunction Syndrome, also known as "ARDS".

Fear not! "ARDS" is a condition that can be treated with proper corrective actions. It is a fact that 9 out of 10 doctors agree that the best treatment for "ARDS" is a good dose of "Radio Activity". Doctors also agree that the most efficient delivery method for "ARDS" treatment comes in the form of participation in the **2006 Michigan QSO Party**. The number of ARDS patients seeking treatment in the MiQP has been growing every year. Remember, this is a yearly condition, and yearly treatments may be needed. Treatment may be administered in single exposure doses taken in the comfort of your home (Single Op), or when you travel in your car (Mobile). If you are apprehensive about taking the treatment when you are alone, you may be treated within a group session (Multi-op), or as single treatment member of a larger support group like your radio club. Your treatment support group can compete against other ARDS support groups.

Warning! Dosages should not exceed time periods of over 12 hours. Exposure times of less than 12 hours may be appropriate depending on the severity of your condition. Remember, even short exposures to MiQP ARDS treatment will be of benefit to you. If at any time during the MiQP treatment period you experience excessively high "fun" levels, you should consider terminating or reducing the level of treatment. In rare cases excessively high "Fun" levels have been known to last for days after the treatment. If these high levels should persist, see your family doctor.

The Michigan QSO Party ARDS treatment should only be taken as prescribed below.

Date /Time: Michigan QSO Party, sponsored by the Mad River Radio Club, from 1600Z April 15th until 0400Z April 16th. Stations may operate the full 12 hours. (12 noon to 12 midnight local Michigan time on April 15th)

Modes and Categories: Phone and CW on 80/40/20/15/10 meters. Single-op, multi-op, and mobile categories. Single-op entries are categorized by output power, QRP (5W or less), Low Power (100W or less), and High Power (greater than 100W)

Multipliers: Work stations once per band and mode. Work other states and Michigan Stations. MI to MI QSO's are allowed. Work portables and mobiles again as they change county, state or province.

Exchange: Exchange QSO number and location (county for MI stations, state/province or "DX" for others).

Scoring: One point per phone QSO, two points per CW QSO. Count multipliers once per mode. Multipliers are MI counties for all entries, plus states & provinces for MI entries only. Final score is total QSO points times total multipliers.

Freqs: Suggested frequencies: CW-3545, 7045, 14045, 21045, 28045; Phone-3850, 7225, 14250, 21300, 28450.

Log Submittal: Mail logs no later than 30 days after the contest to: Mad River Radio Club, c/o Dave Pruett, 2727 Harris Road, Ypsilanti, MI 48198 or via e-mail to logs@miqp.org

More Information: For complete rules, along with free logging software, log and summary sheets, see <http://www.miqp.org>

All kidding aside, the MiQP is a ton of fun. It has been growing in size every year. We expect this year to be even better! There will be stations on from all 83 counties. Consider making it a club event. This is a great way to get folks on the air. I also ask that you all help spread the word about the 2006 MiQP. Let's all make Michigan "Radio Active" on April 15th!!

73 Mark NU8Z NU8Z-MiQP@comcast.net

MIQP FOR FIRST-TIMERS

By Dave Pruett, K8CC
k8cc@comcast.net

The Michigan QSO Party (MiQP) is an operating event held annually with Michigan as the center of attention. This article is a quick overview for those new to MiQP, to explain what it is and to offer encouragement to jump in and participate.

First of all, what is a "QSO party"? Over the years, this term has come to define an on-the-air operating event focusing on a particular geographic area. Amateurs inside the target area (in this case Michigan) earn points towards their QSO party score for making contacts with other amateurs located anywhere, while amateurs outside of the target area get QSO party points only for contacting amateurs inside the target area.

Perhaps the next question is: "Is the MiQP a contest?" Yes it is - the entrants are participating against one other and plaques/certificates are awarded after it is over. But don't let that scare you off - the MiQP is a lot less intense than other contests you might be familiar with, such as Sweepstakes, DX contests, or even Field Day. The bands are not as crowded as during those other events, and the operating style is a lot more relaxed. It's a great venue for a first-timer to get their feet wet.

Why might you want to participate in the MiQP? First of all, it's a great opportunity to hone your HF operating skills or work the bugs out of your HF station. MiQP can provide a concentrated dose of operating that will crack the rust off your CW ability or brush up on your phone operating techniques, skills that you can use in other on-the-air activities.

The fun thing about MiQP for Michigan amateurs is that we are the center of attention. When a Michigan station calls "CQ MIQP" there will usually be several replies. Many MiQP participants make several hundred contacts during the event, even with modest stations such as bare-foot transceivers and dipoles. For many, there is a tangible feeling of camaraderie as you work fellow Michiganders, some located in sparsely populated counties with exotic names like Chippewa, Missaukee, or Presque Isle.

What does it take to participate in the MiQP? All it takes is to get on the air during the MiQP period and make

contacts with other participants. When it's over, mail in your log if you like so that it can be checked and your score included in the results; you may even win a certificate or plaque. If you include your radio club's name in your entry, then your score will be tabulated along with other member's scores in a separate sub-competition to determine the top Michigan club in the MiQP that year.

When does MiQP happen? MiQP occurs the third Saturday of April every year. For 2006, the starting date for MiQP is Saturday, April 15th. The contest period begins at noon local time here in Michigan (1200 EDST or 1600Z) and runs to local midnight (2400 EDST or 0400Z on April 16th). The contest period was deliberately chosen to be easy to fit into your weekend schedule - you can get up Saturday morning, get some chores or family activities done, and sit down for an afternoon or evening of operating.

Making MiQP QSOs is easy. You can operate on any of the "traditional" HF bands (i.e., no WARC bands) from 80 thru 10 meters. The exchange is your QSO number for that contact - i.e., the first is 001, the second 002, etc., plus your Michigan county. On CW, everyone uses the official county abbreviations from the list on the MiQP web site. Stations outside of Michigan will send their QSO number and state or province abbreviation.

Barring some sort of major propagation disturbance, you will find MiQP activity on 40M CW & SSB for the entire twelve hour contest period. This is a good band to get a mix of in-state and out-state coverage, plus it's popular with the mobile MiQP entries that move from county to county during the event. (Mobiles can be worked again when they change counties.). During the day there is usually good activity on 20M, and lesser amounts on 15M and 10M, depending on the solar cycle. Once darkness falls, there is a lot of MiQP activity on 80M.

Here's how your MiQP score is calculated. Each CW QSO is worth two QSO points while a phone QSO is worth one point. Your final score is equal to the QSO points you've accumulated multiplied by the number of multipliers (Michigan counties, non-Michigan states and Canadian provinces) you work. Multipliers are counted sepa-

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FIRST-TIMERS ...

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rately on **both** CW and phone. For example, if you work Washtenaw County (WASH) on both CW and phone, that's two multipliers.

As you start out in MiQP you might just want to make QSOs and have fun, but here are some suggestions to keep in mind which should increase your score. A station may be worked once on both CW and phone on each band, so try all five bands (and both CW and phone) to look for MiQP QSOs. The lower bands (80M & 40M) are usually better for in-state QSOs, and out-state QSOs out to 500 miles or so, but try the high bands (particularly 20M) to bolster your score with US states and Canadian provinces from out west. Also, while most people probably have a preferred mode they like to operate, because state and province multipliers are counted separately on CW and phone, in MiQP it's worth the effort to spend some time on the "other" mode to build up the multiplier count for a good score.

When MiQP is over, you have thirty days to submit your entry in order for it to count in the final results. (Note: If you make MiQP QSOs but don't send in a log, no harm is done; the people you worked still get credit for your QSO(s) with them.) Paper logs can be sent to: **Mad River Radio Club, c/o Dave Pruett, 2727 Harris Road, Ypsilanti, MI 48198**. Electronic log files (ASCII text only) can be e-mailed to LOGS@miqp.org.

What can you win for participating in MiQP? The Michigan winner in each majority category receives a beautiful 10" x 13" plaque, a total of eleven in all. The top single-operator score in each Michigan county making at least 50 QSOs wins a handsome certificate.

To learn more about MiQP, check out the Michigan QSO Party web site at <http://www.miqp.org>. There you will find a wealth of information including complete rules, contest forms (summary, log, and multiplier count sheets), a list of county abbreviations, past MiQP results, operating tips and links to free logging software.

REPEATERS

(Continued from page 2)

signals. Once he does some testing with this, we may purchase a dedicated 440 vertical for this purpose. Ideally, we would use Yagi's pointed at each location (but this is the DART, and we don't want to break the budget!). As the original method has worked somewhat well for this amount of time, Murray expects the separate Omni receive antenna to do better.

Again, this project is waiting on Murray, who has to divide his time between many things. If you are interested in assisting us with this, contact one of the HPARC Board members and let them know you want to help! The only way to make things happen is to volunteer.

Finally, just an open note about John/K8ZEC. John was one of the original members of the DART when it first came to life. He has a lot of interesting stories about the system, and I'd like to invite him to share a few with us here in the Zero Beat. So look forward to a future article from John—I'm sure you'll have a better appreciation of the repeater and the work that's gone into it over the years!

Tony/N8VR

For Sale

2M Mobile Kenwood TM-261A and 2M Mobile ICOM IC-2100 Both \$100.00 each. Contact Sean

k8khz@yahoo.com

[ed—if you know anyone who has anything to sell please have them contact Marsha ka8dmr@arrl.net]

INSTALLING PL-259s THE RIGHT WAY

By Dave Pruett, K8CC, k8cc@comcast.net

I've been a ham for almost 37 years, and for all that time I've hated installing PL-259s on coax cable. Robust connector installation is crucial to building a reliable station, and as I've gotten older, I've come to realize that the key is doing it the RIGHT way. Like most hams, I've seen the diagrams and read the descriptions in the ARRL Handbook, but up until now never took the time to follow the advice.

I have since come to understand that there are five keys to reliable installation of PL-259s:

1. Use Good Connectors - With silver plated PL-259s available for \$1 apiece at Nema or at most hamfests, putting cheap or used connectors on a permanent cable for your station is false economy. I never buy regular plated connectors anymore, because it is much harder to get the plating to take solder. I have filed off the plating near the braid holes to expose bare brass beneath and found it to take solder well. Radio Shack PL-259s are useless in this regard, being made of steel which won't take solder if exposed.

2. Use Good Coax - In this context, "good" coax is defined as having a tightly woven braid with good coverage (i.e. very little of the center dielectric is visible). This is particularly important when attempting to tin the braid (see step #3 below). A tight braid traps the dielectric inside so that it doesn't seep through during tinning. Polyethylene dielectric is much better than foam in resisting heat and melting.

3. Tin The Coax Shield - Tin the braid, just like they show in the Handbook, which offers two advantages: first, it prepares the braid to make connection to the connector shell, and second, it simplifies the task of trimming the braid and center dielectric.

4. Use The Correct Tools To Make Cuts - A plumber's tubing cutter will make cuts that are consistent and square to the center axis of the coax. Use the cutter to make initial

"grooves" in the outer jacket and tinned braid, then finish the cut with a sharp razor knife. "Sharp" is the key here; the blade should be almost new.

5. Use The Right Soldering Iron - For many years, I relied on the typical 100/140W Weller soldering gun to install PL-259s. While this worked well for tinning the braid, and for soldering the center conductor, soldering the shield (even when properly tinned) through the access holes seldom resulted in a totally trustworthy connection.

A big improvement in my PL-259 installations came when I acquired a 250W "Black Beauty" soldering iron (see photo below). This bruiser weighs several pounds, is over 14" long with a tip that's 5/8" in diameter. With that much mass heated with 250 watts, soldering the braid through the PL-259's access holes is no problem. In fact, I've heard of people heating the iron in their workshop, unplugging it and carrying it outside and still able to make the connection!

Soldering irons this massive are not something you'll typically find at your local hardware store or Radio Shack. Fortunately, MRRC's own **Pete Michaelis, N8TR** buys them quite often at garage sales or flea-markets, cleans them up and re-sells them. Pete was the source for the iron I have, and if I recall the price was in the \$25-35 range. Check with Pete to see what he has "in stock".

With the right tools, your coax connections will be more reliable, which prevents failures at inconvenient moments. In recent years I'd taken to the "K9TM cable postulate"; that is, "Life is too short to make your own cables". The consequence was that I'd taken to buying pre-made cables from companies like Cable XPerTs. But now that I have the right tools and the right procedure, installing PL-259s on coax cables is no longer dreaded, but is almost fun. And it's a highly useful skill when you need to make specialized cables for your next big array. □

Article courtesy of Mad River Radio Club (<http://www.mrrc.net>)



**Black Beauty Soldering Iron
(with a PL-259 to show scale)**

NEXT MEETING

March 8, 2006
7:00 P.M.
Hoover Elementary School
23720 Hoover Avenue
(at Tucker Rd.)
Hazel Park
Between 9 Mile &
Woodward Heights
(East of I-75)



Mark your calendar for the April meeting on April 12, 2006 at 7:00 P.M.

WE'RE ON THE WEB
WWW.QSL.NET/W8HP



Hazel Park Amateur Radio Club
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