

SHORT CIRCUITS

Newsletter of the Kent County Amateur Radio Club

February 2024

Officers		Repeaters
President	Jim Moore KC3BTV	146.970 (-) 77hz pl Dover
Vice-President	Hunter Grier KC3VTB	146.910 (-) 77hz pl Camden
Secretary	Tim Reisinger KC3OO	147.300 (+) 77 hz pl N3YMS
Treasurer	Tom Libertore N3ARX	444.550 (+) 77hz pl Dover (down)
		442.450 (+) 127.3 hz pl Harrington
		449.775 (-) 114.8 hz pl N3IOC Felton

Happy Valentine's Day

Happenings

February 8	AUXCOMM Meeting, 19:00
February 13	Membership Meeting, Kent County EOC, 19:00
February 14	Valentine's Day, don't forget guys!
February 26	Emcomm Meeting, EOC, 19:00
March 9	VE Testing, Wyoming Methodist Church, 09:00
March 12	Membership Meeting, Kent County EOC, 19:00
March 14	AUXCOMM Meeting, 19:00
March 25	Emcomm Meeting, EOC, 19:00
March 31	Easter Sunday
April 9	Membership Meeting, Kent County EOC, 19:00
April 11	AUXCOMM Meeting, 19:00
April, 29	Emcomm Meeting, EOC, 19:00
May 9	AUXCOMM Meeting, 19:00
May 14	Membership Meeting, Kent County EOC, 19:00
May 27	Emcomm Meeting, EOC, 19:00
June 8	VE Testing, Wyoming Methodist Church, 09:00
June 11	Membership Meeting, Kent County EOC, 19:00
June 13	AUXCOMM Meeting, 19:00
June 22 – 23	ARRL Field Day, site TBD at this time
June 24	Emcomm Meeting, EOC, 19:00
July 9	Membership Meeting, Kent County EOC, 19:00
July 11	AUXCOMM Meeting, 19:30
July 29	Emcomm Meeting, EOC, 19:00
August 8	AUXCOMM Meeting, 19:00
August 13	Membership Meeting, Kent County EOC, 19:00
August 26	Emcomm Meeting, EOC, 19:00
September 9	Membership Meeting, Kent County EOC, 19:00
September 12	AUXCOMM Meeting, 19:00
October 8	Membership Meeting, Kent County EOC, 19:00
October 10	AUXCOMM Meeting, 19:00
October 28	Emcomm Meeting, EOC, 19:00
November 12	Membership Meeting, Kent County EOC, 19:00
November 14	AUXCOMM Meeting, 19:00
November 25	Emcomm Meeting, EOC, 19:00

Hamfests

- April 20 **Delmarva Amateur Radio and Electronics Expo, ARRL Delaware State Convention**
Sussex Amateur Radio Association
Cheer Center, 20520 Sand Hill Rd., Georgetown, DE 19947
Contact: Jamie Ashton , W3UC, 7446 Parker St. Pittsville, MD 21850
Phone: 410-202-7690 **Email:** ashton@mchsi.com **Talk-In:** 147.090 156.7
- May 5 **Warminster ARC - Annual Hamfest**
Warminster ARC
Bucks County Community College-Lower Bucks Campus, 1304 Veterans Highway (Route 413), Bristol, PA 19007
Contact: George Brechmann, N3HBT, P.O. Box 113 Warminster, PA 18974
Phone: 215-443-5656 **Email:** WARMrcinfo@gmail.com **Talk-In:** 147.090+ 131.8
- May 26 **MFMA Memorial Weekend Hamfest**
Maryland F.M. Association, Inc
Howard County Fairgrounds, 2210 Fairgrounds Road, West Friendship, MD 21794
Contact: John Elgin, WA3MNN, 518 Copley Lane Silver Spring, MD 20904
Phone: 301-641-5313 **Email:** marylandfm@verizon.net
Talk-In: 146.76/224.76/444.0 PL107.2
- July 27 **CVARC Annual Hamfest**
W3ACH
Chambersburg Steam and Engine show grounds, 1500 Criders Church Road, Chambersburg, PA 17201
Contact: Jim Stephens, KB3ICU, PO Box 121 Chambersburg, PA 17201
Phone: 717-382-8834 **Email:** cvarcw3ach@gmail.com **Talk-In:** 147.120+ 100 PL tone

More hamfests listed at www.arrl.org/hamfests. Check at the web site, or call the contact person, before going to any hamfest to make sure it has not been canceled, as many are and have been.

Editor's Comments

Well, I finally heard something on CNN that I can agree with; people need to get out and vote! In our case, I was looking at the results of our Section Manager contest, which is the only one I have access to the number of ARRL membership, in comparison to the total number of hams in our section. The only recent elections were ours and Alaska. Now Alaska had a total of 177 votes cast, and there are supposedly over 3400 licenses. In Delaware we had a total of 241 votes cast and I am told that is about half of the ARRL membership for the Delaware section, out of 2373 licenses (according to QRZ). Using the handy dandy calculator it says that about 20% of the licensed hams are ARRL members.

Not real long ago ARRL members received a survey asking their opinion on raising dues and other issues. About 12% of the membership of the Delaware Section responded. Recently the board just tabled the By-Law 46 issue that would make the ARRL more secretive than it is already. Don't think it is? How much does the CEO earn a year? If the new By-Law is passed it will get worse. If there was a 75% representation of membership of ARRL members across the country, that information would probably be public, and the board would pay more attention to the wishes of its membership. We could provide a start to the process by getting more licensees to join the League here in Delaware. And maybe instead of complaining about what the ARRL does, we could begin directing it more.

I recently made an interesting discovery, that there are about four different classifications where hams have pretty much figured it all out and just about "know it all". Think about it, there is the group of hams who were around when Marconi was in diapers and really have experimented enough to realize what really does work! These are the guys you need to get out to Field Day enticing them with an easy chair and warm glass of milk, if necessary. They actually HAVE done almost all of it. They are the ones

anyone can learn from, if you let yourself. Unfortunately there's not many of these walking "stores of information" left in the area.

Next group is the guys who THINK they know pretty much everything, and have just enough experience that they can provide a few places where their ideas may have worked once, but are like closed parachutes, their minds don't work!

Next group are the guys who may have just gotten their tickets to maybe twenty years out. They know that they have a lot to learn and take every chance they can to pick the brains of the "stores of information" at every opportunity that is presented, because since there are very few of these hams left, the opportunity rarely presents itself. In fact I really haven't seen one of these "stores of information" for some time! This group "thirsts" for all the "good" information they can get, and they are, and grow to be a "value" to the hobby.

Lastly is the group, that may be new people up to ten or fifteen years, that know it all and can not be told any different. These are the "dangerous" ones, because they lead new and younger people down paths that really yield no satisfying benefit in their golden years and tend to, either, drop out of the hobby, or discourage new younger people, that they drop out. Always fun to watch this group "crash and burn" because I love to tell them, "I told you so!" I've got a number of this sub-group peeved off at me because the "I told you so" didn't sit too well.

President's Column

Thus far in my limited (10 year) ham radio career I have one CW contact to my name and I think that was a gift. I have played with, and struggled to learn Morse code off and on for the past 50 years. In 2024 my goal is to finally gain some proficiency. I know I will probably never become a speed demon but that is okay.

I have been, once again, going through the LCWO course but this time I am taking my time in moving from one lesson to the next. Instead of taking the approach that 90% is good enough to move on, I want to do better. I read an article the other day where the author said the thing that was holding people back in increasing code speed is that they hadn't learned the characters well enough for instant recognition. They have to think about what the character is rather than know what it is. I want to do it enough to just know the characters without thinking. Just practice, practice, practice. I have been told to just get on the air to improve. I would prefer that getting on the air not be a blood pressure rising, sweat inducing event. Been there, done that, not fun.

A second thing that I am concentrating on is letting go of the characters that I don't know almost automatically. If I have to stop and dwell on a missed character, I miss the next several ones. Not a good trade off, missing four to maybe gain one. For me, letting that character go is very hard to do. I am working on it.

What does my learning code have to do with KCARC? Ham radio is full of many different opportunities and modes. Try doing something different this year to keep your interest up. Check into the Delaware Traffic Net, do a parks on the air activation, participate in field day, learn a new skill like Morse code, check out one of the many digital modes like VARAChat (like ft8, but you can actually have a conversation), try SSTV, or even contact the ISS, but most of all – have fun.

73,

Jim KC3BTV
President KCARC

Vice-President's Column

With Winter field day in the not so distant past, I would like to take a moment to reflect upon it. During the initial setup, the radio room was set up within a span of 5 minutes, not too surprising considering all the equipment was set up. There were 16 total people who signed in during operating hours, 2 of which happened to be visitors interested in our operation practices and what we were doing on the air.

We unfortunately did not have round-the-clock 24 hour operation, however collectively the club station amassed about 250 voice contacts over about 12 hours of operation time. If I can remember correctly, from voice contacts alone, we had an estimated score of around 1,200 points +/- a few.

With these statistics in the past, it isn't too early to start thinking about Summer Field day and how we are going to be operating.

Just a thought!

73! - Hunter
KCARC Vice President

From the Section Manager's Shack

Delaware Section,

January has brought a change in the weather; several times in fact. I sit here in my shack with the weather about 70F when just a few days back I had about 4" snow on the table in my yard. But yes, I am one of those odd operators that love that four letter word, snow.

The weather has brought a new Skywarn Coordinator in Sussex up for the first time as NCS. Operating as NCS provides valuable experience whether you run a Skywarn NET, local ARES Net or your club net. Two of the most common items mentioned after a drill, exercise or real incident are the lack of experienced NCS and digital operators.

January also brings one of the most popular EmComm events, Winter Field Day. Several clubs were up and running with WFD providing valuable experience for their teams and club members. WFD is 'technically' an EmComm event for us to test our emergency communications skills by moving us out of our comfort zone. With most of us our comfort zone is at home but setting up a portable, mobile, or indoors in a different location all provide valuable experience with our equipment. Points can be had by making contacts with an easy exchange but it's not just the contest or the EmComm work that brings me back year after year. It's the social environment of having fellow radio operators to help troubleshoot, network with, and enjoy a nice meal.

Prior to the WFD events I was invited to attend a radio talk show that broadcasts to several local radio stations and Live Facebook and YouTube channels to discuss WFD. I was able to pass along the value of this event to the amateur radio community and encouraged the public to attend. A great time talking about something I enjoy immensely.

As Section Manager I am hosting a Delaware Section Leadership Meeting on February 10, 2024 in Dover. This meeting will be attended by Section Staff, club presidents and other invitees. I encourage everyone to grab your County EC, Club President and pass along any questions/concerns you may have for Section Staff. Section Staff will be having quarterly meetings with every other meeting open to anyone who wishes to attend. This gives everyone in the section a voice to the events in & the direction of the section.

Both Section and County EOP's and Frequency Reference Sheets updates are being completed as you read this newsletter. With these documents completed we will be better prepared to help our communities which are a large part of why we are Amateur radio operators.

If you have not joined the ARRL Delaware Section Reflector (groups.io) you should do so. The calendar is filling up with many classes and events so there is something for everyone. Check the calendar often for updates on classes such as a new Zoom CW Class being offered.

I extend a warm welcome to new/upgrading amateurs in our community:

KB3JUV Justin T Kates
KC3AEA Thomas A Brennan
KC3YFW Brandon E Elliott
KC3YGG Brian C Booth II
KC3YGH Jeremy Davis
KC3YHW Frank D Sofia Sr
KC3YIE Ronald A Wintersgill
KC3YIJ Raymond J Bloch

February has two popular contests. The School Roundup on February 12-16 and the popular International DX – CW Contest. March brings the International DX – Phone contest on March 2-3. Visit the ARRL's Contest Calendar for details on these and other contests throughout the year. Feel free to contact me at any time with questions. Hope to work you on the air.

73, Steven Keller
Delaware Section Manager
Email: kc3dso@gmail.com
Cell: 240.515.0620 Office: 302.604.7470
<https://groups.io/g/ARRLDelawareSection>

The Emcomm Corner

As I write this it is 17 degrees out with six inches of snow on the ground and I am thinking of last Saturday. I spent two hours shoveling snow off my driveway while my snow blower watched idly from the door of my garage after it failed to start. Things did not go well Friday evening as a harbinger of things to come. I filled the empty snowblower gas tank and immediately gasoline started pouring on the garage floor from a rotted hose going into the carburetor. To get to the hose end I had to remove a cover plate which was not very cooperative. Then I noticed that the choke was stuck in the closed position. A bit of WD-40 loosened up the choke so it would move. I reassembled everything and thought I was ready to clear the driveway the next day. On Saturday (after the ARES net) I got dressed in my insulated coveralls, mittens and boots ready to blow the driveway clear. I spent probably fifteen minutes trying to start the snow blower without success. Thankfully it has an electric starter so I wasn't pulling the starter rope. I let it sit while I cleared the driveway with my trusty snow shovel. I then tried starting the snow blower again. It started – sort of – but would only run with full choke. Obviously the carburetor is partially plugged and needs to be taken apart and cleaned. I now have that chore to do before the next snow.

What do my adventures with a snow blower have to do with ham radio and disaster preparedness? Everything. Last fall I dutifully put my lawn mower away in the shed and pulled out the snow blower. Did I test it then, even though it had not been run for 2 years? No, I just assumed it was ready to go since it worked the last time I used it. It is a whole lot easier to work on something when it is 65 degrees out than when it is 20 degrees. Think about the things you have "ready" for emergency operations. Are they really usable and ready to go in a crunch? Put together a plan to periodically use and test equipment before you have to rely on it.

73,
Jim KC3BTV

AUXCOMM News

AUXCOMM Column February 2024

Locals, Newcomers and Change

The population of Sussex County in 2010 was 197, 883. In 2020 it was 255, 956; a 23% increase. By comparison the total population in the United States only grew by 7.7 %. So there are a whole lot of people here that weren't here when the Double Blizzards of 2010, a.k.a. "Snowmagedon", hit. Then in 2012, Hurricane Sandy came by and tore things up a little. Going back to the eighties, there was a "something", Nor'easter, blizzard, or hurricane every year or two. Since 2012, not much to talk about.

For those that are in the population increase, there is no "storm memory". No idea what can happen if Mother Nature goes wild and wicked. The lifestyle and dependence on the cellular telephone and internet has grown exponentially over the same period of reference, then versus now. Cell service here in Sussex County went down for several hours, August 23, 2011; and there was nothing in the county, storm, accident, incident, or anything else to physically cause the failure. There was a small earthquake in Virginia, across the Chesapeake Bay that was felt here as a little shaking. Panic of the population here caused the failure with everybody having to call somebody to say "did you feel that?"

There are a number of amateur radio operators in Kent and Sussex counties that went through much of the weather related emergencies from the mid-eighties to today; some even back to the "Big One" in 1962, that forever changed the coastline of Delaware. They have "storm memories". They know what worked and what didn't. Many of them were, and still are, associated with the Emergency Management authorities in their county. That body of knowledge is getting older and shrinking. The sharing of that knowledge to the newer generations of amateur radio is vital. Training directed at what works is necessary. Practicality is important when wide area power losses occur. Preparation for what may happen, and what it will take to make things work needs to be addressed.

When, not if, the next emergency hits in Slower Lower, it's going to be a real issue to respond to and recover from. The infrastructure, transportation and utilities, has not kept pace with the population growth. Hurricane evacuations are going to be a nightmare exceeding what was seen in Florida a few years ago. The amateur radio operators in the affected areas are going to have to be ready to respond. That is going to take a concerted effort by the individual operator, their family, the group or club they are associated with, and the community they reside in. We've got a lot of licensed operators in Sussex County that are not or only minimally operational. Many have no idea what to do if they were called upon to respond. We've got to change that. First get them operational, second get them integrated into the response of their group, club, or community. The telephone systems in the county are going to fail in a major disaster, be it a Hurricane, Blizzard, or Nor'easter. How long they're out is dependent on multiple factors. Particularly in these newly developed communities that are gobbling up the landscape, and swelling the population. Panic will set in if the residents lose communication and even more likely if they need an emergency response.

The Sussex County AUXCOMM Group has recently started working with and helping to develop the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program in the county. The response has been greater than expected. They want "Hams" to join with them and help them. Already we are seeing a relaxation of antenna regulations in one community where a ham has agreed to work with the community CERT Team. I will predict that if there is a disaster, and I hope by the same token there isn't, and Ham Radio saves the day by relaying a call for help from a community to the EOC, and that brings a First Responder response, antenna regulations will be relaxed in that community.

Later, 73
K3PFW

Club Happenings

Winter Field Day Has Come and Gone

Seems that the HF air around the EOC got warmed up a little this weekend as KCARC members ran Winter Field Day out of the EOC. Seems that we had about sixteen people show up and about 250 QSOs were made. The group ran as 1I (one transmitter, Inside) and did very well.

As a side note, a buddy of mine from Tennessee sent me a text on Sunday and said he just worked me on 20 meter phone. Since I was on 15 meter CW at the time, it made me interested. Then he asked if we were "N3Y". Apparently he had just worked Danny, W3WCB, who (or is it whom??) was at the mic at that time. Good Job guys!!

News Flash!!!!!!

I have just been informed that KCARC has secured the "N3Y" one by one call for ARRL Field Day 2024. Summer Field Day will be held on June 22 – 23 at a location to be determined. As our Vice-President stated in his column, it isn't too early to start the planning for a fun and successful Field Day. QSL cards are available for those that have contacted N3Y and request the confirmation.

No Dues for Young ARRL Members

It is reported that the ARRL Board has voted to establish a new option for a no-cost Associate membership for full-time students of age 21 and younger. So students should go to the ARRL website and apply for their membership at no cost, and build the roles of the League.

Crypto Transmission from KPH

Don't know how many of you tuned your receivers to one of the frequencies that the Maritime Radio Historical Society (MRHS) used in conjunction with the Cipher History Museum to send the "number message" on Saturday, 20 January, over its station KPH, but you should have. It was a really fun event, and one that most amateurs could have had a ball with. KPH sent the "number message" over the air twice by CW on their usual CW frequencies and then sent it over the air twice by RTTY (45 baud) on their usual RTTY frequencies. That gave you digital people a chance to copy also.

I tried copying the message with my compromised antenna, since my dipole is on the ground after our windstorm a couple weeks ago. Signal was not great, getting KPH at a 439 to 319 at times with QSB. The RTTY was no better, as the computer could not keep a lock and did no good. The CW copy was the best and I was able to decipher the message. If you didn't get it and tried, contact me and I'll tell you what it said.

Thanks to Stephen Keller for putting it on the reflector. By the way, you copy it Stephen?

CW Class on Zoom

If you didn't see on the reflector, Steven Keller post ed following;
"A Sussex County Resident, Eric, WG3J is running CW Zoom Training classes. For those of you that may not know Eric he's a very active contester with an incredible contesting station. Eric does, I think, 40 wpm or so. Many of us in Delaware have visited his station to participate in contests. Eric is a superb contesting resource and is your one stop source for anything HF, contesting, HF antenna builds, baluns, etc. He welcomes visitors to his contesting station to help expose new Hams to the joy of HF and contesting.

The Zoom classes will be Tuesday and Thursday at 8pm and will run for 8 weeks. The Zoom address is 82583299662. The password is 910860.

For more information contact Eric directly at wg3j61@yahoo.com."

Eric says he takes up to about twelve people per class to be able to provide students enough attention. If interested in availability, contact Eric.

Another great resource for learning CW is the Long Island CW Club (LICW). LICW gives three levels of classes, Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced. By the way, Eric has been an instructor for LICW. The classes are free, you just need to put in the effort.

Also keep in mind, W1AW still sends plain text CW practice every week day on its published frequencies at various speeds from 5 wpm to 35 wpm, Slow code practice at 5 wpm to 15 wpm, then fast code from 35 wpm to 10 wpm, alternating. See arrl.org for more details.

Life Membership

Looking through the new issue of QST I came upon an interesting page. Now and then the ARRL will put in QST newly elected Life Members. In the February issue I came upon one Paul K. Tuley, N3BUH, that has been elected a Life Member by the ARRL Board. Congratulations Paul!

Stinking Space?

According to an article published by the New York Post as reported on the Gutfeld Show, astronauts report that space that clings to the outside of their space suits smell like “metallic burnt meat”. Others have reported the smell of “rum and raspberries”. Some even say it is “a gunpowder smell”. Of course, all these smells come to the noses of the astronauts after they come back inside the International Space Station, since taking a whiff outside would be fatal!

I guess these “moon bounce” hams will just need to cut down on their transmitter power, hi hi.

Useless Facts of the Month

There are 328 people named "Abcde" in the United States. (Pronounce that ten times fast!)

George Washington gave the shortest inaugural address at 135 words. (But they were powerful!!!!)

70,000 new computer viruses are found every day by anti-virus companies. (No wonder my computer always has a “cold”!!)

There are 100,000 miles of blood vessels in an adult human body. (Never make that in an EV!!)

While most of the satellites orbiting other planets take their names from various mythologies, Uranus' moons are unique in being named for Shakespearean characters, along with a couple of the moons being named for characters from the works of Alexander Pope. To date, twenty-seven moons have been discovered around Uranus; those named after characters from Shakespeare include Titania (A Midsummer Night's Dream), Oberon (A Midsummer Night's Dream), Ariel (The Tempest), Miranda (The Tempest), and Puck (A Midsummer Night's Dream).

Chionophobia is a phobia characterized by an irrational and intense fear of snow. The word chionophobia comes from the Greek word for snow (chióni). People suffering from chionophobia experience extreme anxiety and distress when exposed to snowfall or even the thought of snow. This fear can be debilitating and lead to avoidance behaviors, impacting daily life during winter months or in regions where snow is common. Chionophobia, like other phobias, can be triggered by a past traumatic experience or may have no apparent cause. (Probably a phobia shared by Emergency Managers??!!)

Tidbit of Information of the Month Department

“ Don’t Throw Those Odd Pieces of Speaker Wire Away Just Yet” – W2PB

“Waste not, want not.” If you are a QRP operator as I am, I am always building wire antennas for my HF kits, as spares or alternate antennas, or repairing lightweight wire antennas . Recently I have been

building 49:1 UnUn (Unbalanced to Unbalanced) matching transformers for End Fed Half Wave antennas, and 9:1 Ununs for Random Wire antennas. Then I stumbled across an interesting antenna on YouTube.

The antenna uses 35 feet of dual wire speaker cable. One side is the hot wire and uses the full 35-foot length of wire for the radiator. I then use the other wire, silver side, and cut it to 17.5 feet and use that for the counterpoise. When I cut the wire for the 17.5 ft section, I cover the cut with heat shrink, making sure the cut in silver wire is at least ½” wide so as the two sections don’t touch any wayward strands of wire.

I terminate the end of the 35' wire and the 17.5' wire with bare wires inserted and wrapped around a Banana to BNC adapter. This adapter is the most expensive part of this antenna. The far end of the antenna I add a plastic carabiner to suspend the antenna. This antenna relies on your portable radio to have an auto trans match (ATU), or by using a manual tuner, or a 9:1 UnUn.

I can use this antenna with the trans match in my Xiegu G90 or my Xiegu X6100, or Elecraft K1 and K2. With QRP radios without a transmatch, I use my Elecraft T1 transmatch (ATU). When I’m done using the antenna, I can easily roll it up and put it away, or stuff in a pocket.

The antenna is lightweight, compact, easy to use, and if you damage it or lose it, you are not out much money. On the positive side it normally performs very well from 40-10M. I also carry 45 feet of yellow, pink or orange fiberglass string as a throw line along with a large nut that weighs 1-2 ounces as my throw weight.

The antenna wires are wrapped around a small antenna winder. I picked up 9 of them on Amazon for less than \$14. (RRR Antenna 9 Pack Small Antenna Wire Winder) They are great for winding small wire antennas. When done, the antenna goes into a pocket. I use another winder to carry the throw line.

In conclusion, you are a ham radio operator; experiment, build something, adapt something and above all operate. The simplest antenna project is to build a counterpoise for your HT. Use 19” length of wire for 2M and 6.5” for 70cM. Strip off the end of the wire(s) and make a twisted loop to fit over your radio antenna connector. If you want you can make the high end version and use a crimp or solder ring terminal. Attach the radio’s antenna and you are ready to go with a stronger RF signal (RX/Tx). This can be made in minutes by using dual conductor speaker wire. One side for 2M and the other side 70cM. This is a great addition to an HT Go Kit (I told you not to throw your wire scraps out.). Go Kits are not restricted to advanced privileges licensed operators. An HT Go Kit could be your radio, this counterpoise wire, a gain antenna, and extra battery. FYI, I carry one of these “rat-tail” dual band counterpoises in my wallet just in case. The project does not need to be expensive and complicated. Experiment, enjoy and operate.

72 (not a typo)
Paul W2PB

Delaware CIO Talks Recruiting, Single Sign-On and Generative AI

As Delaware confronts some of the perennial — and growing — problems that face state government, it’s turning to cloud transitions and identity management while developing new guidance.

January 19, 2024 • Jule Pattison-Gordon

Workforce strains. Cyber threats. Rapidly evolving emerging tech.

As Delaware confronts some of the perennial — and growing — problems that face state government, it’s turning to cloud transitions, identity management and developing new guidance. Forty percent of the IT department is eligible to retire within the next five years, and Delaware is in the midst of developing a strategy to compensate, said CIO Greg Lane. One piece focuses on retaining institutional knowledge, including getting longtime employees to document their approaches. “A lot is written down, but many things take place because people just know what to do, they’ve always known what to do, they’ve been here 20-plus years,” Lane said.

Delaware is also looking to entice a new wave of recruits, including internships that introduce them to the government environment. Lane himself transitioned from private to public sector and said he was pleasantly surprised to find that “lots of exciting technology and work takes place in state government as well.” Lane also hopes to add new entry level and associate positions soon so recruits can onboard while seasoned staff are still around to give advice.

Still, the skill set is changing, and today’s new college graduates are likely uneager to work on mainframe technology. That’s one reason the state is working to move its mainframe from its data center to the cloud — one piece of a larger modernization effort. With cybersecurity also top of mind, Delaware’s Department of Technology and Information (DTI) is working to ensure it’s carefully monitoring employees’ accounts and access privileges, from the time of onboarding through departure. As the state moves toward a zero-trust approach, it’s adopting the principle of least privilege, in which it limits employees’ administrative access to only what’s necessary for the task at hand, rather than granting access more widely.

Identity management is also a big part of customer experience. DTI currently offers single sign-on for internal use by employees. This is being expanded to more applications, with plans that call for eventually providing single sign-on to residents and visitors as well.

All that is part of a larger project to ultimately create a single portal where residents and visitors can get selected services from across agencies. The portal's payment capability is debuting this year and will allow residents to view payments histories from different agencies in one spot. “In the coming years, I hope this continues and grows, and will just get more enriched with the ability to order more services, hopefully, send reminders and do lots of neat things that will make the digital experience for residents and visitors sort of next generation,” Lane said.

Like many states, Delaware is also dealing with the evolution of AI. Agencies are developing their own individual policies and use cases, and DTI aims to help by developing education and guidance about responsible, safe use of the tech. The department also intends to promote and support adoption of use cases it identifies as helpful. The policy is likely to address AI in general, while focusing heavily on generative AI. “I don't think we'll be able to make a blanket statement that covers and mandates the use of AI across the board,” Lane said. “One thing's for sure: Just saying ‘no’ is not the direction that Delaware or any state is going Early on, we're going to try to put some policies and guidance — I wouldn't say standards at this point — out from a central IT perspective.”

Thanks to Government Technology online

Teens Make a Difference Serving on FEMA’s Youth Council

FEMA is currently accepting applications for teens interested in emergency management and community preparedness, which the agency says gives a “glimpse into the future of our profession.”

Teens interested in community preparedness who want to make a positive impact on their communities are invited to join FEMA's Youth Preparedness Council (YPC). Applications for teens in grades eight through 11 are being accepted for a one-year term that begins in July 2024. The teens, as council members, will work on local and national projects, such as designing a graphic novel to help children understand the effects of climate change, creating support groups to help young people who have experienced disasters and creating a book to help young people understand what goes into making decisions during a disaster.

“The Youth Preparedness Council is a unique opportunity for teens across America to get a sense of what it’s like to be an emergency manager,” FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell said in a statement. “It also lets us take a glimpse into the future of our profession — and let me say, the future is bright.” The new council members will attend the July 2025 Council Summit, where they will be able to meet with some of the top leaders in FEMA, the federal government and national nonprofit organizations. They will be able to attend sessions, workshops and networking events, and will be able to present their project proposals to a panel of emergency management experts.

Interested teens must fill out an application form and include two letters of recommendation. They will be selected based on their dedication to public service, their efforts to make a difference in their communities and their potential to continue to make an impact nationwide. Applications and letters must be submitted by March 4.

Thanks to Emergency Management online

Effective Disaster Response Requires Open and Resilient Communications

October 26, 2023 • Todd Perdieu, Director of Product Experience, L3Harris

Reliable communications help provide quick, safe, life-saving help when a natural disaster strikes.

Scientists revised their forecasts for this hurricane season, saying they expect “above-normal” activity based on the latest National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration 2023 briefing. As thousands of responders stand at the ready to rush out selflessly into dangers, it’s vital that they be able to rely on open and resilient communications with their colleagues to effectively perform in their jobs.

Unfortunately, responder communication breakdowns are often a pain point in an after-action review on what could be done better. Many responders either don’t have compatible technology, didn’t have the technology configured correctly or were not adequately trained on how to use the technology. And there’s always a risk that violent storm conditions will take out towers, causing communication devices to go silent. Any of these occurrences can disrupt and frustrate responders in critical moments and threaten the safety of responders and those they’re trying to help.

No responder should have to worry about their communication lines going silent, especially when dealing with dangerous and far-reaching natural disasters. To help avoid communication breakdowns, responders deserve open and resilient systems that give them reliable communications when they need it most.

SYSTEMS THAT ARE UP TO THE CHALLENGE

A wide-area communications system that is open and resilient is the foundation for any community to prepare itself for the risk of dealing with natural disasters. The system must be designed to adequately address conditions that range from normal to life threatening and be able to withstand the punishment from a natural disaster. Asking a few key questions can help you determine if a system can give responders the reliable communications they need.

FIRST, CAN IT CONNECT ALL USERS?

Responders need help connecting with their colleagues from other agencies when their radios are only designed to work within a specific vendor’s family of products. That’s why some responders who use proprietary-based radios are switching to open standards-based radios.

Standards-based radios allow responders to talk to each other across different networks and vendor platforms. What’s more, standards-based radios give agencies freedom and flexibility to choose the device and carrier they like and believe will best support their mission.

Today, P25 is the go-to standard for enabling cross-agency communications. The standard defines various interfaces for radio systems, from how a radio talks to a tower to how responders in one county talk to responders from another. Allowing different agencies using P25-compliant radio systems to reliably communicate with each other during and after a disaster can result in safer and better-coordinated responses.

Through efforts like the Mission Critical Alliance, suppliers are using open standards to connect responder technologies into a larger technology ecosystem. This ability to link together the many technologies supporting natural disaster response efforts – from computer-aided dispatch and fire-alerting systems to live cameras, 3D maps, and personnel tracking devices – can help automate responses and empower responders with real-time information and more outstanding communications. Ultimately, you want open standards that make connecting responders simple.

SECOND, CAN IT MAINTAIN COMMUNICATIONS THROUGH ALMOST ANYTHING?

Resilient is a fitting term for responders who put in long, exhausting hours in challenging conditions. They deserve communication systems that also keep working when times get tough. Building layers of redundancy into communications infrastructure helps ensure responders can count on their communication devices in the most trying situations.

Put simply, no single point of failure should bring down your communications system. At the network level, for example, backup power sources should be in place at a public safety network's core location and all radio tower sites. Back-haul redundancy from a tower site to the network core can also keep radio lines open. Additionally, systems should be designed to provide a base level of communication when multiple major failures occur.

Redundancies are also needed at the device level. For instance, responders' radios that have layered communication paths can keep responders connected even in the most challenging storms. These layers are commonly seen as:

1. Multiple frequency bands that allow a radio to operate on any channel available.
2. Multiple technologies so the device can select either land mobile radio (LMR) or broadband network connections.
3. A "talk around" mode that allows for radio-to-radio communications even if both the LMR and broadband networks aren't available.

Many agencies are also expanding their communication systems to include soft applications that allow responders to speak with anyone on their network via a mobile phone or personal computer. These apps can be beneficial for responders who don't typically carry radios, like relief providers, administrators and government leaders.

FINALLY, CAN IT WEATHER THE STORM?

Many radios used today in natural disaster response were developed to meet military standards. For most responders, that level of physical toughness is more than enough to meet the demands of their jobs.

At the same time, even military-grade radios may not be rugged enough for responders like firefighters to hold up to the extreme conditions they can encounter. They need radios built to a standard like National Fire Protection Association standard 1802, which puts radios through a battery of tests to make sure they are mission ready. In just one of those tests, radios are cooked for 15 minutes at 350 degrees Fahrenheit and then submerged nearly 5 feet in water for another 15 minutes. This test cycle is repeated six times, and the radio's functionality must be confirmed after each cycle.

Of course, today's communications systems don't only face physical threats – they also need to mitigate ever-evolving cyber attacks. Built-in security measures like voice and data encryption can help protect responders' communications and their systems from cyber threats.

Thanks to Government Technology online

Joke of the Month

Old McDonald

It's the final round of the \$64,000 question and only 3 remaining contestants are left, an Englishman, a Texan and an Arkansan.

The question is, finish the following song title and spell the answer. " Old Macdonald had a ____".

The Englishman goes 1st and says "estate" "e-s-t-a-t-e". The announcer says sorry wrong answer, but right spelling, meanwhile the Arkansan is going nuts. He is so excited he cannot control himself.

The Texan goes next and answers " Ranch", "r-a-n-c-h". The announcer says sorry wrong answer but right spelling, and the Arkansan is jumping up and down and he is so excited he almost screams.

The announcer turns to the Arkansan and says "for \$64,000 what is the answer". The Arkansan answers "farm" , "e-i-e-i-o"

Quote of the Month

"Right is right even if no one is doing it; wrong is wrong even if everyone is doing it."
St Augustine