

Prince George Amateur Radio Club

Public Safety Program

A. Introduction

Two of the stated purposes of our club are to promote Amateur Radio in all its forms and to provide, operate and maintain Amateur Radio facilities for the use of members and others. One form of Amateur Radio is the well established tradition of participating in public safety by providing emergency radio communication as a public service. The skill of amateur radio operators and the equipment they operate are readily made available to the public as required. Our club, as presently constituted, has been building its capability for emergency communication since 1997. The Prince George Amateur Radio Club (PGARC) formally participates in this tradition through their Public Safety program. Our club's primary area of operation is within the Emergency Management BC north east region. When required, our club's resources are also deployed to other Emergency Management BC regions.

B. Public Safety - Emergency Communication Objectives

1. Provide alternative communications capability for the Prince George Provincial Regional Emergency Operation Center (PREOC) should normal communication facilities to the Provincial Emergency Coordination Centre (PECC) in Victoria fail.
2. Provide back-up or primary communications for the Prince George PREOC to local government Emergency Operations Centers (EOC) established as incidents occur. At times EOC's or command posts may be established in remote areas where there are no telecommunications services available.
3. Provide communications capability from EOC's to field operations where required.

To accomplish these objectives PGARC has partnered with the Prince George Search and Rescue Society (PGSAR) and our club's emergency communications trailer is frequently mobilized to provide communications for this group. Our club also hosts PGSAR radio repeater equipment at two of our mountain top sites in the Prince George area.

The City of Prince George and PGARC have signed an agreement for our club's assistance in providing communications from city established EOC's when normal telecommunications are not available. Our partners include the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George where our club is part of their emergency plan and we have a representative on their emergency committee.

When incidents arise, our club operates under an Emergency Management British Columbia (EMBC) Task number. EMBC reimburses the club and volunteer amateur radio operators for expenses incurred. Our emergency communications trailer, repeater network, and personally owned radio equipment may be used during incidents.

C. Primary Activities and Facilities

The following is a list of activities included in our Public Safety Program:

1. Foster a close working relationship with Emergency Management British Columbia (EMBC), the Prince George Search and Rescue Society (PGSAR), and the Fraser-Fort George Regional District.
2. Maintain and operate a radio repeater system that is linked to the EMBC office in Prince George and our club Emergency Communication Trailer. The communities included in the radio repeater coverage area are as follows:

Prince George, McBride, Valemount, Quesnel, Penny, Dunster, Vanderhoof, Ft. St. James, Fraser Lake, Fort Fraser, Burns Lake, Grassy Plains, Bear Lake, Salmon Valley, Summit Lake and Mackenzie.

3. We also work with adjacent clubs including the Bulkley Valley Amateur Radio Club so that the

mountain top repeater network coverage also includes Topley, Houston, Telkwa, Smithers, Moricetown, the three Hazeltons, Gitsejukla, and Kitwanga. BVARC and the Terrace group have extended coverage to the communities of Terrace, Thornhill, and Kitimat. Through cooperation with Amateur Radio people in the Peace River district, our network also covers Chetwynd, Dawson Creek, Fort saint John, Charlie Lake, Hudsons Hope, Pouce Coupe and the smaller communities in the region.

To cover these areas our club operates and maintains 15 repeater sites. The area is about 600 kilometers East / West and about 400 kilometers North / South. Most of the area is not covered by commercial communication facilities normally available to private citizens.

3. Operate and maintain emergency communications facilities in the EMBC radio communication room in Prince George. Maintaining the equipment in the radio communication room includes monthly testing for operational readiness. This radio communication room is part of the Provincial Regional Emergency Operations Centre (PREOC).
4. Operate and maintain the club Emergency Communication Trailer. This trailer is equipped with a variety of voice and data radio communications equipment suitable for operating in remote locations. This facility is regularly called into service by EMBC to provide emergency communications for the Prince George Search and Rescue Society and occasionally for other SAR groups in the province. In 2014 and 2015 our club was called out for five (5) and six (6) searches for missing persons, respectively.
7. Participate in the annual Amateur Radio Field Day sponsored by the Radio Amateurs of Canada and the The American Radio Relay League, held annually in June. This is an amateur radio exercise to encourage emergency communications preparedness among radio operators. For this exercise our club's Emergency Communication trailer is taken to a suitable location to test the communication equipment and to practice operating under field conditions.
8. Participate in regional and provincial emergency preparedness exercises by manning the PREOC radio room and/or the Emergency Communication trailer as required.
9. Conduct a weekly radio check-in procedure to test our repeater network and provide an opportunity for radio amateurs to test and operate their personal equipment, report on signal strengths and practice amateur radio operating procedures. This exercise is known as our "Sunday Two Meter Net".
11. Assist with traffic control for parades held in the city of Prince George. This is also a fund raising event to raise money for the maintenance and operation of our repeaters.
12. Provide emergency communication for the City of Prince George Emergency Social Services as per our formal agreement.

D. Community Support

Community support of our Public Safety program comes from a variety of sources. Some of the most important support is from the following:

1. Radio amateurs who regularly join our club and pay the annual membership fee. Our usual membership is from 50 to 60 people. Our members generously give of their time and skills to maintain and operate the repeater network, the Emergency Management BC radio communications room (Prince George) and the Emergency Communication trailer during both exercises and emergencies.
2. Emergency Management British Columbia provides a meeting room for our monthly meetings as well as a dedicated radio room adjacent to PREOC in Prince George.
3. The Prince George Search and Rescue Society (PGSAR) regularly requests our assistance during

searches for lost or missing persons. We train with PGSAR and have provided additional radio operation training to Prince George and Mackenzie Search And Rescue members.

4. The Fraser-Fort George Regional District provides an indoor storage facility for our club Emergency Communications trailer.

5. The City of Prince George provides a tax exemption for our repeater site in Prince George.

6. The Government of BC provides three leased sites (Tabor Mountain, George Mountain, and Milburn Mountain) and our club has been given tax exempt status at these three locations.

7. Various commercial communications companies (Telus Communications, BK Two Way Radio, CKPG-TV/Radio, T & S Communications, and Central Interior Communications) provide free occupation of selected sites and cover our electricity consumption.

8. Various non-profit groups share their repeater site facilities with PGARC.

9. The local non-profit community radio station CFIS-FM pays our electricity bill for sharing our Carney Hill repeater site.

E. A bit of history

The earliest recorded public safety event that PGARC participated in was a search for avalanche victims in January 1972. The club was a key part of EMBC's emergency communication planning for Y2K when we worked with the RCMP, Loomis Armored Car, Telus, the City of Prince George, and other critical infrastructure groups. We've assisted in some very large and high profile searches such as the search for Nicole Hoar and for an American amateur documentary film maker. In addition, our repeater network has been used to report a plane crash, forest fires, and climbers stuck on a cliff, and then to direct emergency response personnel to the incident sites. The repeaters have been used in a support role for many searches, and on several occasions, our repeaters have been used to directly conduct part of search operations. Our public safety program has taken us to searches near Terrace, Anahim Lake in the Chilcotin area, and Klemtu which is on an island off BC's central coast.