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Hams operate on a different wavelength

Operators says there's still a niche for their function.

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THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN**

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It's an interesting hobby. One that takes a lot of technical knowledge and a passion for communication.

It can also provide a tremendous community service.

Amateur radio operators, or, as they like to call themselves, ham radio operators, were out in force Saturday communicating with people around the world. That effort will continue until noon today.

The object of their activities, according to Bill Nicoll (one of the operators), is to demonstrate they can set up their own power generators and show they can communicate in the event of a catastrophe.

There is also a competition involved.

The goal of the competition is to make as many contacts as possible. The communications are usually very brief.

The allure of amateur radio is a curiosity to some that with all of the modern technology at society's disposal that allows instantaneous communication. Surely FM/AM radio, television, cell phones, Facebook and Twitter are enough, right?

Not so, said Nicoll.

He gave a case study of a time in California when someone severed the communication lines on a power grid as an act of vandalism.

All communication was lost at the police and fire departments as well as the local hospital.

Ham radio operators put their skills to use and set up stations to assist until the communication lines were restored for a 24-hour period.

"We operate independent of any power grid, so ham radios always work and can be set up virtually anywhere," Nicoll said.

"In the event of an emergency, like a hurricane or a tornado, you routinely see ham radios being set up and assisting communities," he continued. "They can be a very valuable and sometimes life-saving asset."

Nicoll said that not just anyone can be an amateur radio operator.

Aspiring ham operators must be licensed by the FCC and pass three rigorous tests to earn a license.

Nicoll estimated 650,000 people worldwide are licensed amateur radio operators.

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ON THE NET

Pueblo ham operators: www.pueblohamclub.com