

# HOUSTON ECHO SOCIETY

Newsletter - February 2006

Next meeting - Monday, February 13

Presentation: Emergency Electrical Power

Charles Birkhead, AD5VQ



Club call: W5ECO Web site: [w5eco.org](http://w5eco.org)  
Repeaters: 147.08 147.32 224.26  
General meeting location: American Red Cross,  
2700 Southwest Freeway, Houston, TX 77098  
Mailing Address: Houston ECHO Society,  
PO Box 270540, Houston, TX, 77277

## February 13 ECHO meeting – “Emergency Electrical Power” – Charles Birkhead, AD5VQ

Congratulations to Charles Birkhead, who just recently passed his extra class exam and received call sign AD5VQ! Charles will be giving the presentation at the February 13 Houston ECHO Society meeting – the topic will be *Emergency Electrical Power*.

The presentation will include definitions of emergency power, why it is needed and sources of emergency electrical power. This can include generator, battery, solar and wind. The presentation will include load sizing, overcurrent protection, current surge requirements and consequences of inadequate surge current capacity. Other items to be covered include RFI noise, NEC compliance, costs and much more. So come on out and learn all about emergency electrical power!

## Come out early and get your radio equipment checked for SWR

If you are interested in getting your radio checked out for SWR, come out about an early to the next ECHO Society meeting. Mark Tyler, K5GQ, has volunteered to help check radios for SWR and proper mobile installation. Even if you don't have a radio or license, you are welcome to come out and learn about how radio equipment is checked. For those of you that can come out early, send Mark an e-mail at [K5GQ@juno.com](mailto:K5GQ@juno.com) so he can bring the proper equipment to check your gear. This session is a continuation of our “help for new hams” January meeting.



Mark, K5GQ

## Upcoming meeting presentations on soldering techniques, Winlink and more

The ECHO Society meeting in March will be on proper soldering techniques and equipment, by Phil Swartztrauber, W5GCT. If you need a PL259 soldered bring it to the March meeting (Editor: Phil – I need some jumper coax with 259 connectors – hi) and maybe Phil can use it in his presentation. The April meeting will be a presentation on Winlink and portable packet by Alan Isaachsen, KB2WF. This was set up at the January meeting and drew quite a bit of interest. Other meeting presentations are in the planning stage. One that we'd like to see is a radio direction finding demo. By the way, if you are a member of another radio club and see a presentation you really liked, maybe we schedule the same one for ECHO.

## ECHO test session – February 28

28-February 7:00 PM-2006 --K3FL / Echo Society ARC (Walk-ins allowed)

Contact: FRANZ J LAUGERMANN (713)738-1584 HOME 713-208-0850 CELL

Email: [FRANZLAUGERMAN@SBCGLOBAL.NET](mailto:FRANZLAUGERMAN@SBCGLOBAL.NET) VEC: [ARRL/VEC](http://ARRL/VEC)

Location: AMERICAN RED CROSS - 2700 SOUTHWEST FWY @ KIRBYHOUSTON, TX 77098

# The Curmudgeon's Corner

By Michael P. Martin, K5LAW, M0LAW, G0JCZ

Yes, I renewed G0JCZ. The club didn't say anything, so what the heck...

Marty wanted me to do a corner on the changes I've seen in local broadcast radio and my thoughts thereon. And then he limits me to a one-page column. (sigh) Well, here goes...

I could easily start with a rant about how there's nothing worth listening to on either Standard Broadcast or FM in Houston, but that's mainly a matter of taste, and I have none. (Ask my wife.) So, I'll just start by saying I spent a quarter-century in broadcasting, with my last real radio gig being a fifteen year stint at KRBE. Since I started at the ripe old age of 15, and since I never had much luck with the ladies, I had a lot of time to watch broadcasting evolve from the mid-60's to the early 90's.

Back when I started, there were a lot more technical and programming regulations in place. Transmitter readings (plate voltage, plate current, frequency deviation, power output) had to be taken every half hour. Every station had to identify itself by "call letters, followed by city or cities of license" in the following manner: on the hour; and either on the half hour, or on the quarter hour following the half hour and the quarter hour preceding the next half hour; within two minutes of the specified times, unless a sporting event or program of longer duration than an hour was being broadcast, in which case within five minutes of the above times, (Are you following this?), unless the broadcast was of a concert or sporting event or other program that did not have interruptions, in which case the identification could come at the beginning of the program, at the first break in continuity thereof, if any, and at the end of the program.

Now identification is done once per hour. Period. And, technology has improved to the point now that I don't think transmitter readings are even taken.

Oh, and programming... Back in the day, each station had to devote a percentage of its broadcast day to news, public affairs, community service, and agricultural (!) programming. They were operating in the public interest, you see, as public trustees of the airwaves. That must have changed, too, as I don't see how the right-wing and left-wing talk shows you hear on AM and FM serve the public interest. (And what's really scary is there are people who actually believe the garbage they hear!)

Also, back then, you could only own one AM, one FM and one TV station in each market. Now there seems to be no ownership limits. Maybe this helps explain why there's nothing worth listening to.

And I'm out of space. And there's so much more to say. Oh, well...

*Editor's note: Mike knows a lot about the history of broadcasting and I would love to hear more. If y'all are interested, I'd like him to go on and tell us more in the next issue. I will even give him two pages! – One thing I can remember about broadcasting and growing up in Houston, was that when I was a kid, there were only four TV channels to choose from – 2, 8, 11 and 13. I also remember that in approximately 1970, Houston had a total of one Spanish-language radio station with KLVL-AM at 1480. KLVL is still around and in fact is still on 1480, but now there are dozens of Spanish-language TV and radio stations, not to mention Vietnamese and other languages. – If you want to have some fun, look around on the Internet for some air-checks – or recordings of old radio shows. I've often asked Mike about programming on stations like WLS and KHJ. The music formats are long gone, but it's fun to listen to the recordings from the golden top 40 era. -- Another topic maybe I can Mike to address is that of how many radio stations now claim Houston as their location when they started out in surrounding small towns. Some of these stations even get around the issue by announcing as "Lake Jackson-Houston." Years ago towns like Conroe, Galveston, Baytown and Texas City had their own stations and identities.*

## December meeting

The Houston ECHO Society held its usual family dinner in December at the Tio Pepe's Restaurant in Bellaire, Texas. Our group had excellent food and was serenaded by guitar and singing. After dinner, we exchanged small gifts. Flashlights were very popular exchange gifts! Below are some photos from the dinner event.



## January meeting summary

What a great meeting! The Houston ECHO Society had more than 30 people at a club meeting for the first time in many years. The January meeting was designed for “new” and “prospective” hams. The presentation included general information about amateur radio, information about the Amateur Radio Emergency Services (ARES), public service events, repeaters and repeater etiquette, basic mobile installation of radios and equipment a new ham would probably want to get for the toolbox. Many thanks to all the presenters. The topic of “elmering” was also discussed and several newcomers have paired up with veteran hams to benefit from the “elmering” of the veteran amateur radio ops.

## From the President – looking back, looking ahead for ECHO

Thank you to everyone for making the year 2005 a special one for the Houston ECHO Society. A few years ago, we didn't know if ECHO was going to continue. Membership was down and there always seemed to be repeater trouble. From last year (and the January meeting) it looks like ECHO is starting to grow again. Last year included lots of presentations at meetings, fellowship at the Goode Company, a great Field Day and of course, two hurricanes. We can do without the hurricanes again, but it will be nice to work on a great field day, maybe get into a few contests, help with public service events (maybe ECHO can be the main ham group for communications of an event) and continue with interesting topics at monthly meetings. Some of the projects ECHO is working on include:

- Updated membership roster for printout and to place on the web site ([www.w5eco.org](http://www.w5eco.org))
- Continued assistance on helping with the radio room and the antennas at the American Red Cross
- “Elmering” to newcomers and people interested in getting a radio license
- Continued cooperation with the Cypress Radio Club so we can use 147.000 if 147.080 is down
- New member packets
- More hands-on type presentations and activities at monthly club meetings
- Promoting ECHO through the news media
- Continuing to monitor the BPL test project in Houston
- Several members participate in a medical center area lunch group and others participate in other lunch bunch groups
- Ordered emergency communications videos for possible use at club meetings
- Compiling a complete e-mail list and updating member's emails if they changed recently
- Other projects as suggested by club members and visitors

Again, thank you to everyone for making ECHO a successful organization. Let's keep it going! – *Marty Blaise, AG5T, President, Houston ECHO Society*

## 147.080 to return to the air soon

Lee Gaspard, WA5QXE, is putting the finishing touches on the repairs to the 147.08 repeater. In the meantime, everyone is encouraged to use 147.000 +600 tone 103.5 while the ECHO repeater is temporarily down. The 147.000 is an open repeater and has good coverage of Harris County.

## Newsletter editor needed

ECHO is still looking for a newsletter editor. The newsletter is currently done in Microsoft Word and then converted to a PDF file. All ECHO members have e-mail addresses, so the newsletter is e-mailed. If there are any who join ECHO and do not have an e-mail address, arrangements can be made to print and mail a copy of the newsletter. – If you are interested in being the newsletter editor, contact [ag5t@arrl.net](mailto:ag5t@arrl.net).

## Field Day coming, coordinator needed

Field Day is in June, but it's never too early to start planning for Field Day. ECHO needs a Field Day coordinator. Field Day is a chance to make lots of contacts, but also to promote the good things that amateur radio can do for the community. Planning will be discussed at the February meeting.

## Nomination of officers at February meeting and elections to be held at March meeting

February is the meeting where ECHO holds nominations for club officers. The election takes place during the March meeting and the new officers are installed at the April meeting. Club positions you can run for are:

- President – runs club meetings, represents ECHO at citywide and other ham radio club meetings, works with all other officers to plan ECHO's meetings and activities
- Vice-President – assists the club president, is the head of the program committee which puts together club presentations and invites guest speakers
- Treasurer – basic treasurer duties, writes checks, takes checks for membership, deals with financial matters in ECHO
- Corresponding Secretary – mails and faxes letters when necessary, promotes the ECHO meetings and other activities by e-mail, checks mail that goes to the ECHO mail box (can inform about hamfests, etc from fliers received in the mail)
- Recording Secretary – records minutes at the ECHO meeting and prepares meeting minutes for approval by membership, also takes digital photos to supplement minutes
- Parliamentarian – makes sure the meetings are run according to Robert's Rules and is available to answer any procedural disputes, helps oversee club elections

## WA5QXE describes his experience as a radio operator at the 5K Houston Marathon

Thought you all might enjoy Lee Gaspard's notes about his experience as a ham radio communicator during the Houston Marathon 5K event. This should give you a feel on how amateur radio operators can contribute in public service events. -- Participants supporting the 5K event: (ZS=location of the ham operator during the event) AC5TL John Gilmore ZS5K-1, WA5ZWY Weldon White ZS5K-2, W4AZJ Rick Whitney ZS5K-3, WA5QXE Lee Gaspard ZS5-NC, N0XFD Chuck Mathews (ECHO member also) ZS5K-X7 Finish, N5VCZ Claudia Kozinetz ZS5K-NL, WB5YJN Roger Yokubaitis ZS5-SL



**Lee,  
WA5QXE**

### Net's Timing:

- 7:11 No wheel chairs in this event
- 7:20 5K Race starts (no one in the starter position so the start could not be broadcast simultaneous to the start)
- 7:28 lead runner (#51036) is at race turn-around point
- 7:35 #51036 passes Texas & Hamilton location
- 7:38 #51036 crosses the finish line as the winner of the 5K race
- 7:40 the first woman crosses the finish line; winning number not noted by observers
- 7:55 Last runner arrives at the course turn-around point (**continued on next page**)

## 5K marathon notes, continued

- 7:58 Turn-around barriers are removed; water station near that point begins dismantling process
- 8:00 end of the runners/ walkers reach mile marker 2
- 8:12 end of pack under the railroad tracks
- 8:20 the last runner appears at Texas and Hamilton
- 8:25 Rack coordinator declares race over; OK issued to secure turn-around and Texas at Hamilton location
- 8:25 Race director releases AC5TL
- 8:30 5K net closes after no traffic for 5 minutes

### Observations:

- The turn around location had difficulty reaching the net control with a hand-held; when Weldon used his vehicle's mobile antenna he could communicate with net control station
- The starter position was open; Net control did not have visual contact with the events of the starting position from where the operating position was set up.
- Downtown repeaters would be helpful! We'll order up a couple for next year's event.
- The 5K net control station was physically removed from the rest of the net control stations. An additional "channel" should be assigned with operational equipment to efficiently contact net control should that be needed. Poor communications was available through the main net because of the hand-held/ antenna/ building shadowing to "hit" the 146.66 repeater from the 5K net control point.
- Carl mentioned the need for 15 – 20 additional operators next year to staff the medical vans/ positions; APRS capabilities would be welcomed in that capacity. Lee suggested that ECHO SOCIETY might be able to increase participation with proper advertising/ requesting support.
- Additional display locations for the (APRS) position information overview are desirable; discussion was noted that explaining that individual runners could not be tracked along the race.
- Amateur video could be useful
- The event could use a down-town located digipeater
- No one appeared to be hurt this year on the 5K run. I did have concerns when the fellow (gray hair, rotund gentleman in shorts and white shirt/ red letters) shown in the attached picture crossed the finish line and two medics immediately went to his aid. You see them looking at the gentleman as he walks away. He nearly collapsed crossing the finish line!

## CenterPoint BPL test

The following item is summarized from a recent article in the Houston Chronicle newspaper. -- CenterPoint Energy plans to use BPL service to help its business. CenterPoint, which owns and runs power lines and offers natural gas service is going to test a program using BPL "intelligent grid" technology over power lines to monitor electric meters, detect power outages and switch service on and off by remote control. The technology will be tested this year covering 44,500 electric customers and 22,500 gas customers. in three Houston areas, IBM will provide equipment and technical support.. Several Houston ECHO Society members have been following the BPL projects in Houston since a meeting between CenterPoint and amateur radio operators last year. ECHO officers will try to have BPL updates at the monthly meetings.



## Treasury update

The Houston Echo Society has \$3,002.86 in the bank as of February 1, 2006.

## ECHO web site

The Houston ECHO Society web site is at [www.w5eco.org](http://www.w5eco.org). The webmaster is Mike Urich, KA5CVH. Take time to browse the web site – lots of interesting information is available plus photos of club activities.

## Transtar upgrades antennas and equipment

Some of you from the Houston ECHO Society came to volunteer at Transtar during Katrina (and/or Rita)! At that stage, the radio room had four (4) dual-band radios and an Icom 706MkIIIG that had been recently installed.

Since then, there have been several more upgrades to extend the range and improve our flexibility to provide emergency communications. The upgrades include:

1. Four dual band Yagis have replaced verticals to give us more range and also to minimize overload from other transmitters. They are made by Cushcraft with 4 elements on 440MHz interlaced with 4 elements on 2 meters
2. Airmail capability on 2meters has been added to provide email messages.



3. Notch filters have been installed on all radios to notch out pager frequencies which are so strong!! They are beautiful little filters recommended by Richard Driscoll and are made by PAR electronics (about \$90 each)



4. AND.....Pactor3 has been added for HF digital communications!! This will be a huge help for moving messages primarily within Texas. It provides high speed communication, and increases in speed if the signal strength increases. With the DSP, Pactor 3 can also pull signals out from below the noise



We hope that there won't be major hurricanes this year and that our services won't be needed!!! BUT everything so far points to a very active season for both numbers and magnitude of hurricanes. – Alan, KB2WF

## Winlink Workshops in 2006

Workshops are being offered this year to help hams become active on Winlink digital programs. Having Winlink capability as an amateur radio operator is a very important aspect of emergency communications!!!! The email capability via ham radio, which includes the use of attachments, is suited to highly detailed or semi-confidential messages. It will never replace voice as the primary mode of emergency communications but together they are very powerful tools to have in your emergency communication toolbox!!!!

Alan,  
KB2WF



Workshops will be offered in Airmail packet on VHF, Paclink and Telpac.

Airmail is the simplest program to get going and can use older PCs, even those with a Windows 95 operating system! It has automatic handshaking so only the call sign has to be selected and then the connect button clicked.  
**(continued on next page)**

## Winlink Workshops, continued

There is no need to learn complicated packet commands. Airmail can connect direct to other Airmail stations, or can send email via the internet.

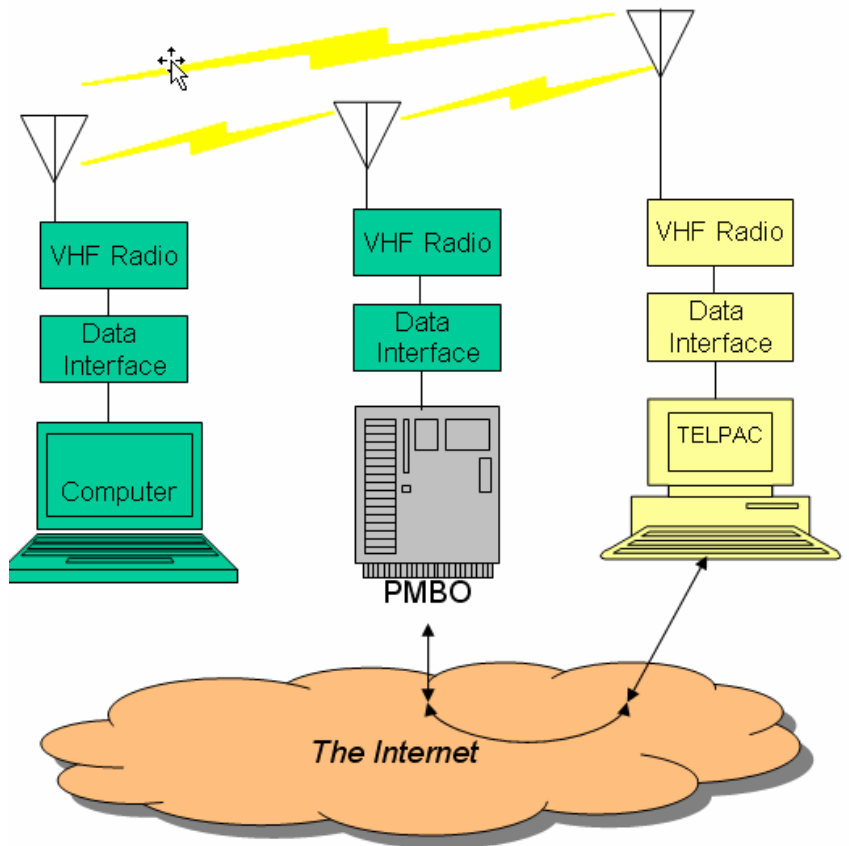
Paclink, along with the AGW program, offers more flexibility. It has excellent monitoring and records of stations heard. AGW allows a computer to run Paclink, a digipeater and Telpac simultaneously using one TNC. But AGW/Paclink requires Windows 2000 or XP, so a faster PC is needed.

Telpac is the gateway to the internet. A telpac station can send and receive email messages to and from the internet and hand them on to Airmail and Paclink stations that connect with it.

The schedule of workshops for the next 2 months is:

- March 11<sup>th</sup> in Spring at the Cypress Creek Education Center - **Airmail**
- April in Sugarland- **Airmail**

Watch next month for an update in the schedule as we add more workshop dates. – Alan, KB2WF



WHY SAMUEL MORSE WAS RARELY INVITED TO COCKTAIL PARTIES.



## Houston ECHO Society

W5ECO

P.O. Box 270540

Houston TX 77277

### Membership Application

The Houston ECHO Society is a general purpose, amateur radio club serving the central Houston TX amateur radio community. The club exists to provide emergency communications support for the Greater Houston / Harris County area and that of the Houston Chapter of The American Red Cross. You need not be a licensed amateur radio operator to be a member. Membership is valid for 12 months from the time dues are received.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ ST: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

FCC call sign: \_\_\_\_\_

ARRL member:  Yes  No

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have special interest's such as contesting, digital modes, hf mobile etc? If so, let us know what they are.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Club secretary use only

Date dues rcv'd \_\_\_\_\_ Period covered \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_