

APRS

With all the buzz about the new Kenwood TH-D7A handheld, many Hams are discovering APRS. But many have questions about this portion of the Amateur Radio hobby. This issue addresses some of the basic FAQ's (Frequently Asked Questions). Future issues will address specific topics like trackers, computer setup, and equipment reviews.

“What is APRS.”

The Automatic Position Reporting System (APRS) is a method which uses amateur radio to transmit position reports, weather reports, and messages between users. The basic components of an APRS system consist of a computer, TNC, radio and APRS software. The software is the heart of the system.

In 1992 Bob Bruninga (WB4APR) introduced a dos software version of APRS. His software has undergone massive changes but is still a popular version. A big benefit of the dos version is the fact it is far less demanding than other versions in terms of computer hardware needs. And, DosAPRS can run on cheaper computers that are considered outdated by today's standards. Today there are versions for Mac, Windows 95/98, and Palm III's.

“What can APRS be used for?”

This radio system can be used for tracking objects, including people, vehicles, boats, aircraft, manned/unmanned balloons, weather systems, or just about anything, using unconnected packets. Useful applications for APRS include disaster response, race/parade support, high altitude balloon tracking, mobile tracking, message distribution, and weather tracking.

“How can I find out more about APRS?”

A good source of information is the internet. Many websites exist with information ranging from software available for download to lists of elmers. Two good sites are the Northwest APRS Group site and the Tuscon Amateur Packet Radio (TAPR) site. Their addresses are www.nwapr.org and www.tapr.org respectively. Both organizations sponsor SIG reflectors. These reflectors allow members of the SIG to post messages to all the members easily in order to further everyone's knowledge. Other interesting APRS websites that can provide more information about APRS are:

<http://www.kcaprs.org/elmers.htm>

<http://www.aprs.org/>

<http://aprs.rutgers.edu/>

<http://www.aprs.net/>

“What frequencies are most commonly used?”

Many VHF APRS networks have standardized on a nationwide frequency of 144.390. In the northwest the Wide Area Digipeaters are on 144.390. These Wides cover Vancouver, Seattle, Central WA, Spokane, Tri-Cities, Southern British Columbia. There are plans to expand the coverage area, but support is needed.

The common nationwide HF frequency is 10.151 LSB. Keep in mind that when transmitting on LSB you are transmitting in the legal portion of the band. It is a little confusing to many as 10.151 is outside the Ham band.

Hopefully your interest has been sparked. I invite you to browse the many APRS related websites. After downloading your favorite software you may undoubtedly have questions. Elmers are listed on many of the sites, so take advantage of them. Or, drop me an email at N7QXO@JUNO.COM and I will try to help you out. Your questions will help me focus future articles and presentations to best meet you needs and interests.

Ron Reeves
Northwest APRS Group
South WA Coordinator
N7QXO@JUNO.COM