



Amateur Radio Endeavour to Increase Air Cadet Safety



Nanaimo, B.C. – For more than 20 years, Ken Welte has volunteered as an aviation instructor at the Air Cadet squadron in Nanaimo and also supervises field exercises. A recent excursion was a 50-kilometre hike to Cape Scott in the northwest corner of Vancouver Island. As a designated safety officer, he needed to scout out the trail in advance. This summer, he went with his wife, who severely sprained her ankle. Although he carried a personal locator beacon (PLB), the accident inspired him to expand his safety toolkit.

“I realized that even though I could pull the PLB, I would have no way to communicate with emergency services until their helicopter landed,” says Ken. “With a ham radio, I would have been able to explain the exact nature of the situation in real time.”

To become a licensed ‘amateur’ radio (a.k.a. ham radio) operator, Ken spent five weeks studying circuit boards, the propagation of radio signals, rules and regulations, etc. Testing was adjudicated by a designated examiner from Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada.

He uses a UHF VHF ham radio, which is similar in size to a walkie talkie, but with approximately 16 times the wattage and more powerful antennae. Ham radio messages bounce between signal repeater towers. But ultimately what makes the system work are the volunteer users.

Ken estimates that there are approximately 100 licenced ham radio operators on Vancouver Island with five to 10 people monitoring the radios at any given time. If a call for help sounds on the radio, an operator contacts emergency services. Over the years, these volunteers have saved lives and averted further injuries.

Now as a licensed operator, Ken is thrilled to be able to offer greater risk mitigation for the Nanaimo Air Cadets during hikes and field exercises. This weekend, he will be participating in a “proof of concept” demonstration. Ken will communicate the group’s location and status then operators should pass information onto his supervising officer. This test is an opportunity to show the effectiveness of the ham radio network.

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