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How to use and equip your HT for use in ARES

Everyone in Nassau County ARES has and uses a dual band HT for communications. It's a very necessary piece of equipment, and is our standard for use in public service events. The HT for ARES use needs a bit of tweaking to make it an effective tool though, so let's run through this list and make sure that yours is up to ARES speed.

1. Make SURE your HT is pre-programmed with our frequency list. No exceptions.
2. Have at least 1 extra battery pack for it with a charger capable of being plugged into a vehicle.
3. Have at least one clam shell battery pack. These are snap-in battery packs that use Duracell AA or similar batteries. We do this because even though they do not last as long as our rechargeable packs, the batteries themselves are readily available in convenience stores and gas stations during emergency use.
4. Have a lapel speaker-mic for the radio. Absolutely necessary! We operate in very noisy environments, such as the boardwalk at Jones Beach or at marathons and even in shelters.
5. Have a headset or at least ear buds for it. There are times when you will hardly be able to hear without them, and there are times when you do not want conversations or information circulating by people trying to listen in on your communications or on our net.
6. The antenna for your HT is the single most crucial element. Most ARES members have various types and adapters to use with our HT's. We use these adapter for mag mount antennas, standard roof-mounted antennas, portable emergency J-poles and others. Buy the right PL-259 coax adapters for this purpose. We buy much better quality antennas than the standard rubber ducks that HT's typically come equipped with. They make a HUGE difference in performance and provide gain. Even at only 4 watts output, I can hit every major repeater in Nassau County from inside my house by using a PL-259 adapter for my big 2m/440 Diamond antenna on my roof.

That being said, you cannot be Shelter Certified by only having an HT as your main radio. **We are not in the business of QRP (low power operation).** We require Shelter Certified radio operators to own dual band mobile radios in the 20-50 watt range on 70cm and 40-75 watt range on 2 meters. We require that you also own the proper antenna rigs, mast, connectors and coax so that you can provide full communications from Red Cross shelter EVEN if your HT can hit some of our repeaters. Additionally, this means you must have the right battery system and power supply equipment (jump kit) to handle the power requirements of a mobile dual band radio.

HT's have their place in ARES operations, but common sense dictates when and where they should be used.

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