

**New England Division Report
The American Radio Relay League
2016 Annual Meeting of the Board of Directors – January, 2016**

[At least 14 days prior to each annual meeting of the Board of Directors each director is encouraged to file with the Secretary a written report on the status of the affairs of the League in his division, together with a statement of his recommendations as to any actions required for the effective administration of the objectives and affairs of the League.]

A New England Division Cabinet meeting was held on Saturday, January 9, 2016, with twenty five Section Managers, Field Organization members, Club Presidents and Advisory Committee leaders present. The group brought up several important topics and concerns they felt were important for the Board to be aware of.

Youth/diversity

We had the usual discussion about getting new hams, especially youth. Proceeds of the publications auction we held were designated to the ARRL's Education Fund. There was a strong feeling that ARRL is still doing far less than needs to be done to generate new hams. People did not know who or which department to contact within ARRL regarding help and tools for their own or club efforts. Within our HQ organization we have a few resources scattered across multiple departments – Field Organization support, Education Department, Volunteer Exams, and Public Relations. They really felt there should be one individual or department who had a focused goal regarding generating new hams.

In July 2014 the Board said it “supports a significant increase in the resources directed to generating new amateurs, with particular emphasis on increasing diversity, that staff be directed to propose a course of action to meet that goal, and that the first steps be taken during the process for establishing the 2015-16 Plan.”

Here we are now 18 months later with a budget that has taken only a baby step in that direction. We have to do better than that.

Drones

As a new Novice Class drone owner I've thought of some ways it might be used to support my ham radio efforts. This was a topic at the recent meeting as well. Attendees reported using them for Field Day videos, for inspecting towers, for pulling up lines for wire antennas and a variety of other uses. This is a topic that will be of great interest to hams in QST and other future ARRL publications. It might even be good historically as we could pull out the 1940's(?) RC aircraft in storage somewhere.

There is a related topic that is worth keeping an eye on. A recent Scientific American article focused on the lack of clear law regarding air space below 500'.

http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/so-your-neighbor-got-a-drone-for-christmas/?WT.mc_id=SA_TECH_20151229

The discussion on this may get into some things we care about – ham radio towers – so we will want to keep an eye on whatever the future brings.

Solar Power

New England is starting to see significant growth in the installation of solar panels on residences, a bit later than other parts of the country. According to the ARRL Lab there have been few RFI issues reported and conformed. Local club members have started to run into RFI problems with neighbors and their own installations in some cases.

As the technology and business models have evolved the solar panel installations appear to be running into riskier territory. Many panels now have individual small inverters incorporated into each panel instead of one large inverter to support multiple panels. As prices drop, the quality of materials may be dropping, along with RFI filtering. A recently accepted article for QST details the considerable effort and expense one New England ham has gone through to quiet his system.

A second area that may be problematic is ownership of the panels and determining who is responsible for any RFI clean up. A large number of installations are now use leased equipment, operated by a third party, with the homeowner taking a portion of the generated power and sale of power.

My sense is that solar power will be installed in everyone's neighborhood in a few short years, and any problems will be widespread if we do not keep on top of them and work any issues through the FCC effectively. We will want to make sure the Lab has the resources necessary to be able to respond quickly to problems in this area.

FCC and Enforcement

As usual, enforcement is a regular topic at New England Division cabinet meetings. There is widespread support for any efforts the ARRL makes to get the FCC to pay attention to enforcement of power line noise issues, jamming, etc. As I noted in an email to the Executive Committee, it won't be too long before members start to question our resolve and ability if we can't start to move the FCC on this. While many people don't like or trust the government, they will find the ARRL a more easy to reach target if things get much worse.

There were some suggestions that there is a need for more training and information so individuals and clubs can track down power line and other sources of RFI. Utilities are not proficient at locating noise sources.

We have to improve our communications with members on what we are doing, what obstacles we are facing, and why things are not happening. We also need to find better ways to make sure our issues fall on the right ears in Washington at the FCC and elsewhere so we can begin to see some of the high profile problems reduced.

Other

Other areas generating significant discussion and interest were:

- Likelihood of the Pave Paws 420-450 MHz upgrade to impact repeaters within 100 miles of Cape Cod (Boston, Providence, Worcester, even southern NH and ME). We expect an additional 10db of protection may be necessary. Alternatives for repeater owners will include moving to 902 MHz and 1.2 GHz but that may leave many users behind.
- Continued interference by fishing buoys on 160m, and some SSB on 160/80M from fishing boats.
- There is a lot of interest in the pending allocations at 600m and 2200m. If the FCC does give us access to both bands, there will be a lot of kudos for ARRL, maybe even more than the 5 MHz changes.
- Several people had some heartburn over the change to 146.52. The reasons for our changes there were not clearly enough publicized and described. Overall, the consensus was that this change may hurt in some EmComm circles but the need to stimulate activity on the band was a higher priority. The group indicated that they will see what happens locally and report back if there are significant problems then the ARRL can take another look at the issues.
- Hamfest are getting smaller, with the larger vendors becoming harder to attract. Hamfests that took place from 8am until 3/4pm 10-15 years ago are almost all just half day events now from 8am until noon. It seems like a lot of activity for used equipment is now on the Internet.

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