

How do I?

An occasional series

This week: Prepping... for Armageddon

Author's Note: I really hope you never have to do any of what I am about to describe.

It's always good to be prepared, and elsewhere in this series we have discussed some portable VHF and HF Go-Kits, mobile and base station radios, portable antennas, etc. Today we are going to discuss some worst-case scenario communications. The prepper community on the internet is full of some excellent advice, and there are a few good sources of solid amateur radio advice out there.

Most people I think understand the need to be able to shelter-in-place (another term for what FEMA calls Staying Where You Are) for three days. But when the worst happens: nuclear war, alien invasion, King Kong roams the earth, and all civil government breaks down and perhaps military government also isn't present, none of us can imagine how bad life will be. I don't care how many times you watched *Red Dawn* or read Tom Clancey's *Executive Orders* and *Executive Decisions*, or what internet-based role-playing games you excel at, none of us can really imagine it. *The Postman* and *Mad Max* movies were the G-rated versions of life after it ends as we know it.

So, if you believe you will be around for the end of life as we know it, and if you want to be prepared, what will you do communication-wise?

One thought is: Do Nothing. You have a better chance of survival as a hermit. The other thought is: being a hermit is a lonely existence. And no one can be completely self-sustaining. At some point you are bound to need something that other humans have to offer.

So, if you are optimistic and if you want to be able to reach out to someone, what do you need?

Remember, we are talking the worst possible scenarios here. Calling 911 is not going to be an option.

You need: VHF, UHF and HF capability. You need stealthy antennas. Your Titan on a tower, or that beautiful ~~legal limit~~ triband beam is a beacon that says ~~Good stuff here, come and get it!~~ You need stealthy and you need hidden.

Take a look at the Chameleon Antenna line of products. Yes, they are expensive. And, according to the reviews, they work. There are other antennas, and some have reverse engineered the Chameleon products and built their own. If you Google search the words ~~Chameleon Antenna~~ it leads you to their Facebook site: <https://www.facebook.com/ChameleonAntenna/>. From there, you will find a link to their website: <https://chameleonantenna.com/>

The ideal antenna lets you set up quickly, get your message out, dismantle, and move on before anyone who may have detected your presence has time to find you. Remember, we are talking about worst case scenarios here.

One of the books in my library is *Two Eggs On My Plate* by Oluf Reed Olsen, Rand McNally, 1952. It is the story of a young Norwegian who escaped by boat from Norway to England after the 1940 invasion. He then went to Canada to become a radio operator and parachuted back into Norway twice to help set up and operate clandestine radio stations. The Germans had a fairly sophisticated network of radio direction finders but he was never caught. The book is thin on details about the radios, batteries, antennas and frequencies, among other things, but it seems they mostly used long wire antennas on the 40 meter band and probably 20 meters and 80 meters as well.

Olsen gives no hint as to power levels, but I cannot believe they exceeded 100 watts. 10 watts or even less is more like it. Again, your object is to get on-the-air, get your message out, and move. If you cannot move, then you need to stay hidden. In my opinion, under these conditions, the antenna is the most important part of the radio system. You need power, most likely derived from solar cells charging a few batteries, and you obviously need a radio, but there is no point to having a great radio if the antenna gives you away. The Yaesu ATAS 120A antenna with a Yaesu FT991A or FT857 transceiver may be a good option as well. The Yaesu FT817, FT818, Icom 703, Icom 706 and the brand new Icom 705 are a few of the potential radio options out there.

Operating. Before the end times come. Before you need it, before you wish you knew it, become a REALLY good CW operator. Why? 1. CW works well at the low power levels you will be using. 2. You do not want to have to mess with a computer for some of the other digital modes such as THOR-22 or PSK31 if you need to move now! 3. You are trying to stay stealthy. CW uses Morse Code.

Sure a few thousand people know Morse Code, but well over 99% of the population doesn't, so that helps hide what you are saying. The bad news is, not many people will reply because they don't know how to.

Reception: When choosing a radio you may want to look at one that covers not only the short wave radio bands but the FM and possibly AM commercial bands as well. That way if anyone is able to transmit news or announcements you have more possibilities of hearing them. And you would have only one radio to tote around.

Practice: Developing a good fist is an art that can take a lot of time. The more you are on the air and the more you practice, the better you will become. If you think you will use phone (voice communication) practice as well. You may want your voice to be recognizable. If disaster conditions are truly as bad as you think, the use of call signs and other traditional ham ID techniques may have been abandoned in the interests of self preservation. But if the operator on the other end recognizes your fist, or knows your voice, he or she may be more willing to reply.

We have not yet covered topics such as Electro-Magnetic Pulse, or obtaining power from sources other than solar and battery. Maybe another time.

Catch ya on the air!

Acronyms, Glossary, and Other Notes:

Term	Additional Information
AM	Literally, Amplitude Modulation. In common usage, AM refers to the radio broadcast band occupying 540-1600 KHz.
ARES	Amateur Radio Emergency Service
ARRL	American Radio Relay League. The National Association of Amateur Radio
C4FM	Continuous Four Level Frequency Modulation
CW	Literally, Continuous Wave. In common usage, CW means Morse Code.
D-STAR	Digital Smart Technologies for Amateur Radio. A digital voice and data protocol.
Echolink	Application that interfaces Amateur Radio with the Internet
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FM	Literally, Frequency Modulation. In common usage, FM refers to the radio broadcast band occupying 88-108 MHz
HF	High Frequency. Between 3 MHz and 30 MHz.
Icom	One of the big-name manufacturers of Amateur Radio equipment.
MARS	Military Affiliate Radio System
RACES	Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service
SATERN	Salvation Army Team Emergency Radio Network
Skywarn	Amateur Radio data collection network for National Weather Service
SSTV	Slow Scan Television
VHF	Very High Frequency. Between 30 MHz and 300 MHz
UHF	Ultra High Frequency. Between 300 MHz and 3 GHz
Yaesu	One of the big-name manufacturers of Amateur Radio equipment.