



PCARA Update



Volume 12, Issue 10

Peekskill / Cortlandt Amateur Radio Association Inc.

October 2011

Hurry came

I would like to begin with a **Thank You** to *PCARA Update* Editor-in-Chief Malcolm, NM9J who graciously filled in for me in last month's edition of the *Update* (September 2011 - Volume 12, Issue 9).

On the morning of August 27, 2011 like so many others in our region, I was dealing with the effects from Hurricane Irene. The power went out at about 3:00 am as the wind was howling and the deluge was well underway. During this time I was periodically checking on the status of the sump pumps in the basement, prepared to start the generator if needed to bail things out. Around 5:00 am while checking on one of the pumps in the laundry room, I heard a faint drip, drip, drip... and thought, "Hmm, this might not be a good thing since we're in the middle of a hurricane." Upon further investigation I noticed a puddle on the floor behind the freezer, below the main electrical/breaker panel for the house. Where was the water coming from? You guessed it, from the electrical panel! Somewhere from my distant past I remembered that water and electricity don't play very well together, so maybe it was a good thing that the power had gone out!

I shut off the main breaker, removed the front cover from the panel and discovered that water was entering the enclosure directly through the cable of the main service line, flowing over the breakers and into the bottom of the box. Through the generous use of insulating foam sealant and coax-seal I managed to stanch the flow to a dribble. Using paper towels I dried things up as best I could, and then creatively placed some pieces of plastic sheeting to direct any future drops of water away from the breakers and into a bowl on the floor. At 6:00 am I noticed that the lights in my neighbor's house were on, so I held my breath and using a piece of wood, switched the main breaker back on. I'm happy to report that nothing happened other than the sump pump coming to life and ejecting multiple gallons of water from the sump. Later that day I placed a call to an electrician to make an appointment to have the panel inspected. The joys of home ownership!

There are a couple of events coming up in October. The Bergen Amateur Radio Association (BARA) is

hosting its Fall Hamfest on October 1, 2011 at Westwood Regional High School in the Township of Washington. Details can be found at the BARA web site, www.bara.org. Also, the New York QSO Party is being held on October 15-16, and PCARA is once again sponsoring the New York Phone Plaque. Please visit <http://www.nyqp.org/> for more information.

Our next regularly scheduled meeting is at 3:00 pm on October 2, 2011 at Hudson Valley Hospital Center in Cortlandt Manor, NY. I look forward to seeing each of you there.

- 73 de Greg, KB2CQE



Bob N2CBH, Ray W2CH and Marylyn KC2NKU enjoy Candlewood ARA's Hamfest at Newtown, CT on Sept 11.

PCARA Officers

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Adventures in DXing

- N2KZ

Irene Goodnight

Let's have a hurricane this weekend! It seemed like a novel thought. Hurricane Irene had been sitting in The Bahamas stalled like it was stuck in New York City traffic on a Friday night. It wasn't until the morning of Saturday, August 27, that it finally made land in North Carolina and Virginia. The media hype was unprecedented. New York City television stations began non-stop coverage of the storm that lasted all weekend. Radio stations had dropped music programming and were simulcasting their all-news sister stations or television audio. Irene was not just a hurricane. It had become a major media event.

Here at home, we responded with a little more sanity. All the outdoor deck furniture came in along with all the plants and anything else that might go airborne. I made sure the gutters were cleaned out and all the windows were secured. Our seasonal in-window air conditioners were temporarily removed. We filled our largest bathtub with water along with other jugs and vessels. I gathered all the flashlights and brought out my cache of D batteries. Prepared and anxious, it was time to sit and wait.



National Weather Service predicts the path of Hurricane Irene from its position on Friday August 26.

Saturday afternoon, I called my boss at work and said I would not be in on Sunday. I was not about to leave my wife and kids alone at home just to log another day at work. The sky was remarkably clear. It was a beautiful day with sunshine and warmth. Later in the afternoon, the first signs became more and more obvious. The air became thick with humidity. It was

going to be a bumpy night.

The rain began around 8 pm or so. From past experience, I knew the power would go out. It was just a matter of when. Living in the country, at the very end of a power leg, we lose power a couple of times a month as a rite of passage. No question. We were going to be sitting in the dark. My roof was also likely to donate a shingle or two to major storms. Que sera sera.

By ten o'clock, Irene had become a full-forced blustery rain storm. The wind howled outside sounding like a huge train going by that never ended. Short periods of calm would turn back to more powerful gusts. Exhausted, I fell asleep around 11 pm. The winds woke me up several times during the night. I noticed that some lights around the house were left on but I was too lazy to turn them off.

As the night progressed, I began to think we might escape a blackout. I stirred again around 2:55 am to see the lights flicker. Miraculously, they stayed on until about 3:05 am. With a bump, the big switch had opened somewhere. We were in black and would stay that way for a long time.

One thing I noticed, that I found very odd, was the brightness of the sky. All night it appeared to be lit in gray with the low light you would expect just before dawn. When dawn came, the storm was still flailing around at full force. I became annoyed wondering when it would cease. I was glad to see that no major branches or trees had fallen nearby and all the cars were safe. The elasticity of the tree branches amazed me. Trees really know how to swing and sway when they have to.

I had been listening to the radio all night. WCBS 880 was doing great coverage. WEPN 1050 was simulcasting the audio of the non-stop coverage from WABC-TV Channel 7. This was the first major storm that reminded me that we had transitioned into the digital age. I no longer had a way to watch TV with a battery operated set. All my portable equipment was analog. I'll have to see if I can find a digital to analog TV converter that will run on 12 volts for the next time.

I also scanned the 2 meter and 440 MHz amateur radio bands. Only after listening for a long time did I hear some traffic on the WECA repeater in Valhalla. I checked in just to say 'hi' and that I survived. Very little traffic was being passed and all seemed fairly calm.

Dawn came and the sky became a little brighter. The storm was relentless. In mid-morning, we experienced the eye of the hurricane passing over us. The radio stations commented that the eye was to pass right over Danbury, Connecticut and head north. The calm of the eye did arrive for about 20 minutes or so. The storm then returned, but only for a little while. By

noon, it seemed like the worst of the storm was over. No power! We were still in the dark.

It was now about 3 pm on Sunday and I thought it might be time to venture out and see what had happened. I was thrilled that our house was completely dry and unscathed. The air was filled with a very strong scent of freshly broken branches. If you have ever trimmed a healthy maple tree, you know this smell. Amplify it about 100 times and you would understand what we experienced. The world smelled wet and woody. Our deck now had a carpet of small broken branches and leaves. Amazingly, not one of my antennas came down! We swept and scooped for awhile and then looked beyond our house.



A large tree had fallen across Karl's road, pulling down power and telecom cables.

The cause of the power outage was obvious. A large tree had fallen across our road pulling the utility wires nearly down to the ground. My daughters and I ventured into the car and went to explore. I was amazed how quickly the emergency crews were slicing up enormous trees and limbs to make roads passable. The electric crews were also scurrying to rebuild their entire infrastructure. Every power line looked like it had been grabbed and tossed by Godzilla.

Huge trees succumbed to severe twisting and snapped mid-trunk. There were so many power lines and other utility cables all over the ground. Many roads were impassable because of downed trees, flooding or work crew trucks. Our automobile movements were slow and cautious. The adventure had just begun.

Without power everything stops at my house. Life just isn't the same without it. The well pump requires power. No water means filling up toilets manually. We made many, many trips down to the swimming pool with water jugs! Fresh water was retained in our bathtub. This lasted for about three days. In contrast, the power came on quickly near where I work. The Connecticut food stores had plenty of water. I became a

hero carrying large jugs of water back to our part of the world. All of our nearby stores were either blacked out and closed or had long been sold out of water.

No power also means no lights. D size batteries became an important item. I was amazed just how long our Coleman lanterns stayed on. We used them for four nights without a battery change. Our solar-powered garden and lawn lights became very handy helpers to our night vision.

I also had to get ready for work in the dark. I had lanterns and flashlights but I had no water. Armed with half a gallon of water, I could once again employ the techniques of bathing learned and developed while I was convalescing after I broke my leg. No problem! I even had neighbors come over with buckets and such to bring home my pool water for their bathroom needs. It was survival of the fittest: Everyone who could cleverly adapt!

Charging devices off-site became a daily routine. With plenty of power at work, I charged my computer (so we could watch DVD movies at night,) checked my e-mail, and made sure my phone and iPod was fully charged. Wi-Fi at work provided a way to sync up my iTunes with new content so I could watch the news at home. Public libraries also became asylums for the electrically challenged. People were eager to use library's free Wi-Fi and A/C power while they waited for their own lights to come on.



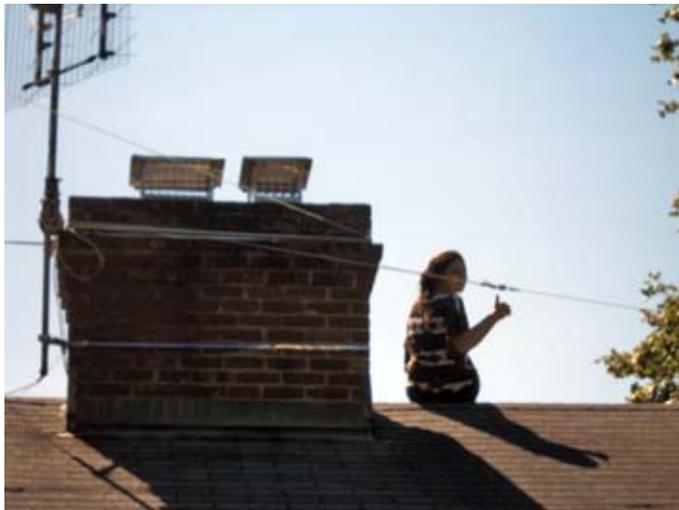
Many roads were impassable because of downed trees and flooding.

I delighted in operating my QRP CW gear during the blackout. This was the one activity a hurricane could not kill! I had nice QSOs on 40 meters and no one really knew I was sitting in the dark powered by a cascade of AA batteries. My portable shortwave radio proved entertaining, too. I could hear many hams, not affected by the hurricane, chatting away just like any other day. Boy, were the noise levels quiet without any man-made QRM around! Listening to two meters, as I

commuted to and from work, was often quite silent. I'm guessing everyone stayed off the air in deference to emergency traffic.

I really missed using my old analog battery-powered TV. I don't yet have a DC powered digital ATSC TV and, even if I did, I would need a way to power my antenna's pre-amp to bring in strong enough DTV signals to make pictures at the receiving end. Analog TV was sorely missed.

On other communications fronts, I used a variety of battery-powered scanners to listen to local police, fire and utility frequencies. There was a consistent flow of events highlighted by quite a few fires. Were they set off by candles or flashing downed power lines? Lots of activity revolved around road closings and more cataclysmic events. Very, very little activity was heard on two meters or 70 cm until well after all the power came on much later in the week.



Sarah inspects Karl's antennas after the storm.

One of my friends had the right idea. A friend of his, from Rockland County, drove over to bring him a spare small generator. Since he was a DirecTV subscriber, as soon as he had a source of power for his satellite receiver and flat screen, he was back in business! The refrigerators and the TV was all he needed! Other friends with Cablevision had to wait until their A/C power was returned - and - their cable service was restored!

Every community seemed to be offering their constituents dry ice and pool water. Crowds would gather every time a notice or sign went up. 'Pool water free!' 'Ice today at 3 pm!' Ice was a precious commodity. Without electricity to run their refrigerators, residents were lining up to get dry ice and grew disappointed and/or annoyed when the ice did not arrive on time or there was not enough to meet everyone's needs. Pool water was just as important. People really started to appreciate what a wonderful

thing fully-working indoor plumbing was!

I did not envy the telephone receptionists at our local power company NYSEG. They received a constant barrage of demanding calls as their repair crews worked night and day to rebuild their infrastructure. Trucks had arrived from dozens of states and provinces to help with the project. I saw crews from Michigan, New Brunswick, Maine and The Carolinas. The construction was impassioned and endless. I wonder when they slept. Every new repair completion brought more happy faces. These men need applause and recognition. They were our constant heroes for days and days.

Progress was being made, but each passing hour felt longer and longer. On Tuesday afternoon (day three,) my wife and daughters traveled 90 minutes each way to a friend's mother's house in New Jersey just to take showers! What a treat! We also got into a routine of searching out restaurants that were open for dinner so we could have a 'real' meal once a day. We ate a lot of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches! I was amazed how long the refrigerator stayed cold, but by Tuesday we had to dump its' entire contents into the trash.

Wednesday night (day four,) we anxiously waited for the power to come on. Other families in our neighborhood had been restored, but we are in the back woods and away from the main power lines so, for us, the blackout continued. My family went to a friend's house to enjoy their newly restored power. I was home alone and fell asleep in the dark. Around 10 pm, I felt a breeze on my legs and I opened my eyes. My fan was on and so were my lights. Whoo-hoo! The power was back on!

I immediately took a shower just because I could. In the days following, we continued our outdoor cleanup. We were so relieved that our adventure was over. Some neighbors had to be doubly patient. There were homes in nearby North Salem that did not regain power service until a day or two past Labor Day. Hurricane Irene put even more punch into parts north. Vermont and Upstate New York were particularly rampaged with severe flooding. Quebec and parts of Maritime Canada also took a beating.

Now it is all over. It left us humble and thinking. How did our ancestors survive without all our modern necessities? We now appreciated three most cherished items: pool water, ice and D batteries. Propane for barbeque grills and generators also was high in demand. The only thing I'll miss is the amazing star-filled skies at night...and the low, low noise levels on my radios. Be glad for what you have and remember that every day is a gift!

Until next month, 73 de N2KZ
'The Old Goat'



Wireless light

In the pages of *PCARA Update*, we have previously mentioned the consequences of the Energy Bill signed by President Bush in December 2007. (“Farewell to Tungsten”, PCUD January 2008.)

Back in 2008 we reported that within the Energy Bill:

“A less-noticed measure calls for new lamps to be more efficient over the next 13 years and could lead to a phase-out of standard incandescent light bulbs. This part of the legislation seems to have been written for the benefit of Philips, GE and Sylvania — it is likely to favor those company’s more expensive products including halogen bulbs, compact fluorescent lamps and LED lights.”

“Under the lighting measure, all light bulbs offered for sale must use 25% to 30% less energy than today’s incandescent lamps by 2012-2014. The phase-in will start with 100-watt bulbs in January 2012 and end with 40-watt bulbs in January 2014. By 2020, most new bulbs must be 70 percent more efficient. Modified incandescents such as Philips’ halogen bulbs can already offer the 30% efficiency improvement, but as of now, only compact fluorescent bulbs will be able to meet the 70% improvement required by 2020.”

Jumping several years forward into the present, we find compact fluorescent lights are widely available, but there are still objections to their color rendering and they are not really suitable for circuits where the lamp is only switched on for a short time.

LED lamps with useful light output have started to become available and a model from GE was mentioned in “Noisy World”, *PCARA Update*, March 2010. Unfortunately it turned out to be a potent source of RF interference on MF and VHF.

LED lamps with warmer colors have become more readily available from manufacturers such as Philips and prices have been falling. The LED lamp pictured here is a Philips 8 watt model, recently purchased from Home Depot at a price of \$21.97.



Philips LED lamp consumes 8 watts and produces light output of 450 lumens.

In May 2011 the Home Depot introduced a 9 watt LED lamp in its own “EcoSmart” range, with

equivalent light output to a 40 watt incandescent — at a price of \$19.97. This particular model is made by Lighting Science Group Corporation for Home Depot and is significantly less expensive than similar LED lamps.

I had a very good place to test the Home Depot lamp when I had to change a bulb in my garage door opener. Out came the previous ruggedized incandescent lamp and in went the EcoSmart. The bulb did a good job of lighting up the dark garage as I opened the door next morning. All was well as I reversed out of the garage, then I pressed the remote control to close the garage door and — nothing happened! I had to get out and close the door with the manual button on the wall. What was going on?



EcoSmart 9 watt LED Lamp is equivalent to a 40 watt tungsten bulb.



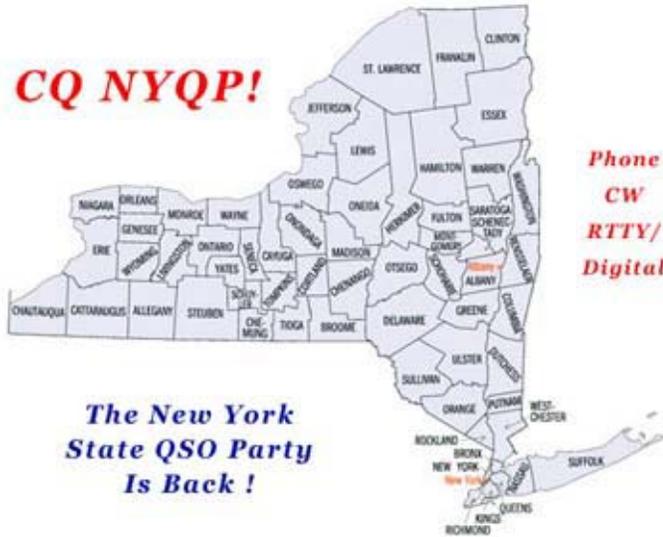
Garage door opener has built-in lampholders at each end. Wire antenna hangs down for reception of the 390 MHz remote control transmitter.

The answer was — yet more unwanted RF emissions, this time from the Home Depot LED lamp. The garage door opener has its own UHF receiver operating in the 300-400 MHz range with a short, wire antenna hanging down. That antenna is only a few inches away from the LED lamp — and the lamp is itself a powerful source of RF interference. Result — while the garage door lamp is lit, the remote control receiver is rendered inoperative by the wideband noise source near the receiver. The fix was to replace the EcoSmart LED lamp and operation went back to normal.

- NM9J

New York QSO Party

The New York QSO Party takes place this year on Saturday October 15th. Start and end times are from 10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. EDT. New York stations try to work as many contacts as possible with stations from inside and outside New York State. For stations within New York, the exchange consists of Signal Report plus County, using a three-letter code. Westchester's code is **WES** and Putnam County is **PUT**. Stations outside New York will send signal report plus State.



There are additional points for CW contacts (2 points each) and for RTTY/digital contacts (3 points each). Multipliers can be claimed for all the NY Counties and US States worked. Bands include 160 - 10 meters HF plus 6 meters and 2 meters on VHF.

Rochester DX Association sponsors the NY QSO Party and arranges plaques for various leading band entries. PCARA has once again sponsored the New York Phone plaque. Further details are available at <http://www.nyqp.org/>

Radio in a box - w2ch

After reading the article in September 2011 QST, on Page 35, entitled, "An Emergency Radio Package - or The Radio In A Box II", I thought about doing it myself.

I recently purchased a similarly sized basic tool box at



Low cost toolbox from Home Depot.

Home Depot for about \$10.00. I looked at which of my transceivers best suited fitting that tool box.

Of the transceivers which I own, the ICOM ID-880H with D-Star and Analog FM fit the bill. By the way, my HF/VHF Yaesu FT-857 is too large to vertically fit in the box. By cutting off the handle of the tool box tray, the front of the ICOM ID-880H was a good fit. I have placed a 7 Amp 12 V Gel Cell

battery in the box and I have a wall wart power cube to charge the battery. I also have used the Astro Flight Super Whattmeter, Model 101 (<http://www.astroflight.com/>), which I had for some time, to monitor the current and voltage of the battery and the power drain when transmitting.



Ray based his design on this article in September 2011 QST by N1GY.



Top view of Ray's "radio in a box". Left to right are the Astro Flight Whattmeter 101, Icom ID-880H control head and Radio Shack external speaker. [Pic by W2CH]

I found that while receive current drain is low, the ICOM draws about 10 Amps on transmit for VHF and 11 Amps on transmit for UHF. Therefore at full power

output, 50 watts, it requires a second 7 amp battery for adequate battery power to run full output, much as the author described in the *QST* article. Additionally, I have attached an external speaker for better audio, though this one is a bit large to leave where it is placed for closing the tool box.

For the antenna connections, I used a UHF right angle connector and a short jumper cable to go to an antenna. I may put a connector on the tool box for external antennas.

- Ray, W2CH

Rearranging deck chairs

Your editor recently carried out a major reorganization of the radio shack. Those who have visited the NM9J radio room may remember that equipment is arranged on metal-framed plywood shelves. I had originally built these shelves back in England to fit around a specific set of amateur radio equipment. One of the shelves had an impressive height of 15 inches, intended to comfortably accommodate an old Dumont oscilloscope that I had used for monitoring SSB transmissions. The oscilloscope is long gone, but that high shelf is still there, as a reminder of those happy days.

Forty years later, the shelving was now overloaded with equipment from the past and I needed to make room for some new items. The time had come for a ruthless clear out.

I carried out some careful planning to determine which items could be moved, and which items would need to be removed. I measured the shelving and used squared paper cutouts to determine what would fit the available shelf space. The conclusion was — most of the vintage equipment from over twenty years ago would have to go.

And so, one Sunday morning I began dismantling equipment from the glory days of G3VNQ and NM9J. Some of those items had very strong attachments, and I was sorry to disconnect them and put them away in their original cardboard boxes.

There was the Sommerkamp FT-480R 2 meter transceiver. Sommerkamp was a badge-engineered Yaesu brand sold by unofficial agents. That was my first ever synthesized radio, purchased just before moving from Southport to Rochdale. All my previous VHF transmitters had been crystal controlled or VFO controlled. The FT-480 was a multi-mode radio capable of operating on SSB and CW, as well as FM. After moving to the USA, I increased band coverage from 144-146 to 144-148, but the radio was of limited use for FM because of the lack of PL tones. Later on, the

FT-480 was put into good service as a packet radio transceiver.

Then there was the mighty Yaesu FT-902DM. This was my first HF transceiver, purchased in the UK just as the WARC bands were being re-released. All my previous HF equipment had been separate transmitter/receivers, with a capability to transceive if needed. The Yaesu FT-902 was purchased some thirty years ago, along with an FTV-901 transverter.



Shelving in the radio room had become overloaded – with much equipment from the past that had not been used in a while.

The transverter was capable of operating all modes on 6 meters, 2 meters and 430 MHz. In the UK, I had the low-band transverter module operating on 4 meters instead of 6 meters. That FT-902 was the last piece of vacuum tube equipment in the radio shack, and the heaviest item I had to move, thanks to the built-in mains power supply.

Another HF transceiver that had reached retirement age was my Kenwood TS-430S, purchased second hand when I was living in the Chicago suburbs. The TS-430 was my first all-solid-state HF radio, and it had an excellent general coverage receiver for MF and shortwave. Here was the first sign that radios were growing smaller, at the same time as more features were being added.

Finally there was an AEA PK-232 terminal unit. This was also purchased in Chicagoland, just as packet radio and other digital modes were becoming popular. The PK-232 could decode packet radio, RTTY and other digital modes without needing a sound card or even a personal computer. Just connect a terminal with a serial connection and off you could go.

All these items are now safely tucked away in their original packaging. One day, when I have a much larger shack, I'll bring them out again and remember some fascinating times in amateur radio.

- NM9J

Peekskill / Cortlandt Amateur Radio Association

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Newsletter contributions are always very welcome!

Archive: <http://home.computer.net/~pcara/newslett.htm>

PCARA Information

PCARA is a **Non-Profit Community Service**

Organization. PCARA meetings take place the first Sunday of each month* at 3:00 p.m. in Dining Room B of the Hudson Valley Hospital Center, Route 202, Cortlandt Manor, NY 10567. Drive round behind the main hospital building and enter from the rear (look for the oxygen tanks). Talk-in is available on the 146.67 repeater. *Apart from holidays.

PCARA Repeaters

W2NYW: 146.67 MHz -0.6, PL 156.7Hz

KB2CQE: 449.925MHz -5.0, PL 179.9Hz

N2CBH: 448.725MHz -5.0, PL 107.2Hz

PCARA Calendar

Sun Oct 2: PCARA monthly meeting, Hudson Valley Hospital Center, 3:00 p.m.

Hamfests

Sun Sept 25: LIMARC Hamfair, Levittown Hall, 201 Levittown Parkway, Hicksville, NY. 9:00 a.m.

Sat Oct 1: BARA Fall Hamfest, Westwood Regional HS, 701 Ridgewood Rd, Washington Twnshp, NJ. 8 am

Sun Oct 2: HOSARC Hamfest, NY Hall of Science, 47-01 111th St., Flushing Meadows, Corona Park, Queens, NY. 9:00 a.m.

Sun Oct 9: Meriden ARC Nutmeg Hamfest and ARRL Connecticut State Convention, Mountain Ridge Resort, 300 High Hill Rd, Wallingford, CT. 8:00 a.m.

VE Test Sessions

Oct 1: Bergen ARA Hamfest, Westwood Regional HS, Washington Township, NJ. 8:00 a.m.

Oct 2: Yonkers ARC, Yonkers PD, Grassy Sprain Rd, Yonkers, NY. 8:30 a.m. Contact Daniel Calabrese, 914 667-0587.

Oct 13: WECA, Westchester Co Fire Trg Center, 4 Dana Rd., Valhalla, NY. 7:00 p.m. Contact Stanley Rothman, 914 831-3258.

Oct 17: Columbia Univ VE Team, 2960 Broadway, 115 Havemeyer Hall, New York NY. 6:30 p.m. Contact Alan Crosswell, (212) 854-3754.



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