

Why EchoLink?

This was written in response to a student query...

Joe: Just downloaded EchoLink. How come I don't see W5VEX on the list? Or is the list that comes up when I open just those stations that are on line now? Anyway, is there anywhere I can go to find out what EchoLink is all about? It looks awesome but what the heck is it used for? Jim

The list will only show the stations that are on. I am not normally on unless there is a reason.

You can use EchoLink for computer to computer connections (ham radio without radio), computer to radio connections (at your computer, you can connect to a repeater with EchoLink connectivity and talk to other hams on the repeater.) or repeater to repeater if both have EchoLink connectivity.

The way we have it set up is:

The local computer has EchoLink installed in 'SYSOP' mode and connects to the EchoLink server via the internet, preferable a high speed link but I used it for years with dial-up. You can have multiple internet connections (Conference mode) on high speed and on dialup you can only support one and even then it might get a little 'choppy'.

The computer then has a sound card interface (West Mountain has several that will work, there is a ULI box available and MFJ carries a couple. You can also build your own) to a radio setting near the computer that has RF connectivity to the local repeater.

So What?

The National Weather Service in Forth Worth has hams on location in their office using a computer with EchoLink on it. They connect to our wide area repeater through a 24/7 EchoLink connection at my cohorts house (N5ZXJ-R) then through a dedicated two meter radio to the repeater. The hams in FTW can then talk and listen to 'Spotters' in our area. The repeater covers about twenty counties that they could not talk to before and had to depend on relays of weather information via telephone. Now they get real time info from the individual spotter and can make requests for specific areas of interest to them. THE NWS LOVES IT!!!

***** Update *****

We have added another EchoLink interface so that we now have a backup system. We have also added another wide area repeater. W5BEC-R (I am the trustee) is on one repeater and N5ZXJ-R is on the other unless we need backup. Mine is restricted to the weather service and certain spotters, the other is open to rag chewing and such except during weather events or emergency situations. We have had to use the backups on two occasions.

I have also recently purchased a cell phone with internet connectivity and this allows me to connect via EchoLink even when I am on the road.

***** End Update *****

We have had the repeater and connection up for about three years and it is just now really catching on. I have a list of about seventy hams that 'Spot' and usually if bad weather is in the area they are available. The NWS is usually amazed when they ask for info from a particular area in the coverage area, someone is there.

I am a weather nut first and foremost and SKYWARN is the reason I returned to amateur radio after a long absence and I then developed an interest in emergency communications. The people on the repeater have come to expect me to give them my opinion on what's happening in the local weather scene any time a cloud appears in the sky. (I teach a fifteen week weather course for the United States Power Squadron, a boating education organization.)

During the Rita/Katrina event we had a group in Waco (The Texas State Guard) communicating with some of their folks that had 'deployed' to the support areas. Local radio to our repeater, then EchoLink to the remote repeater (also on EchoLink), then repeater to the 'deployees' radio. Unfortunately many of the repeaters in the remote areas were damaged. HF mobile rigs were much in demand because of this, but that's another story.

You and I could talk computer to computer if I had EchoLink going... I might get it working in the next hour or two... Look and see if I am on the list later to day.

When you are setting up, go to EchoTest (it is in the list or on the menus at the top as 'Test Server') to get your audio adjusted. This is the toughest part of the setup. You might also have a fire wall problem; there is information about this in the EchoLink FAQs.

When you are traveling in your RV, you can talk to the local repeater back home provided you have an internet connection and the remote repeater has EchoLink connectivity.

EchoLink has several features that assist in controlling usage. We have two modes, normal and Weather. We have a list that restricts the stations that can connect during weather events so that a casual user can not mess us up.

Near the bottom of the list is the 'Conferences', EchoTest being one of them. One is weather related and you can listen in on the National Hurricane Center when a hurricane is causing problems. I also listened to a lot of the shuttle recovery efforts on it. In events such as these, you will see an active channel and a 'listen only' channel.

It is a tremendous tool in the Emergency Communications tool box...

There is a Yahoo group that supports Echolink at:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/echolink/>

Go to:

<http://www.echolink.org/el/>

And select Download

Enter your call sign and email address...

On the next page select the download icon...

And then where you wish to save it...

The download took about two minutes... I will let you know if I have a problem with the installation. Firewalls can cause implementation problems...

A web site with some supplemental information is at:

<http://www.qsl.net/vk2jtp/>

