

Thursday outage illustrates how fragile system is

Friday, April 2, 2010

Modern technology is great when it works, but when it doesn't, watch out.

Lincoln and 15 southeast Nebraska counties found that out Thursday when a central telephone switching system and its backup went offline, leaving callers unable to call 911 or unable to call into the capital city.

Some statewide Nebraska State Patrol numbers were out of service, and most cell phone service was out in the Lincoln area.

The Public Service Commission is looking into the situation, which was corrected by midnight, to see if the company involved deserves to be disciplined.

Amateur radio operators were stationed on major intersections around Lincoln to take emergency calls or direct people needing help to local fire stations.

Communications is actually better now in Nebraska than it has ever been, with the Internet, cell phones, landlines and even satellites offering redundant routes for messages to get through. A new statewide emergency communications system was recently put into operation, a response to the problems experienced by emergency responders during the September 11, 2001, attacks.

But Thursday's relatively minor outage illustrated how fragile the system really is, and what might happen the next time the state experiences a disaster such as a major tornado, flood, blizzard or who knows what.

It also illustrates how important volunteers like Ham radio operators, Civil Air Patrol, emergency medical services and other organizations are in a time of real need.

Members of the Tri-State Amateur Radio Club in Southwest Nebraska are prepared for a communications emergency similar to the one that took place in Lincoln on Thursday. As a club, members all take part in a weekly net on Monday nights for the sole purpose of maintaining communications for the Amateur Radio Emergency Service. More information on ARES is available [here](#).

Members also meet for breakfast once per month and have a club newsletter. Individuals who are interested in Amateur Radio are encouraged to contact club president Mike Manker at (308) 364-9225 or mmanker@gpcom.net

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