

Listening Down The Grid

Thomas Icom - "Ticom" · July 20, 2026

It's 8PM Sunday in Connecticut. That's the day and time of the state's [ARES](#) net. Except for the [Echolink](#) nodes, it's all off the Internet. The repeaters are all linked together via ham radio, [some of the repeater networks are up permanently](#). It's usually the same dozen or so people, I know most of them at least peripherally. One of the section managers used to show up at [EAST Meetings](#) back when G* used to have them. He also was the guy who got all my excess AX.25 TNCs for the state's packet radio network. [Yes, there is still AX.25 up and running around here](#).

This is all down-grid comms. Most of it is either standalone, or running on independent (non-Internet) networks. A lot of it you can access with a \$30 handheld radio and a Technician class ham radio license. If you don't have your ticket, you can still listen with a \$10 swapmeet police scanner. The frequency ranges you want to search are 144-148 and 440-450 MHz. Sometimes, late at nite, things get interesting. Back in the day on the 145.13 machine, an ARES/RACES-affiliated machine with a 90 mile reach, we used to have an informal "nut net" at midnite, in New York. The 147.06 machine a bit further south had a similar late-nite gathering of hams. The repeaters are not as active now as they were back then, but they're still operational and ready for use.

I was at my club's picnic a couple weeks ago, [talked about it earlier](#). One of the members sells radios at the local hamfests and techie swapmeets. Reasonable prices sold by a righteous dude. He had these \$10 Alervites HTs, which are rebadged Baofengs. [Model AT-W31D](#). UHF, 30 channels. Bright orange color so you won't lose it, and recognize another club member from across the field at a hamfest. Turns out 30 channels is enough for the region's major linked repeater system nodes, and a few simplex frequencies for chatting at hamfests or doing microwave liaison work (aiming dishes at each other). You can download the programming software for free, and use your [Baofeng cable](#) that also works on the [Quansheng](#) with the multiple firmware hacks.

A technician class ham license only requires you pass a 30 question test that has a published question pool. Even though it's a technical service, the VHF/UHF bands make for a great local and quite possibly regional down-grid intercom system you can use to talk with your friends who also have their ticket. Don't worry about being tracked by "the man." There are 710,000+ other people in the country who also have their ham ticket, and **nobody cares**. As a bonus, you'll get a helluva technical education by some cool people who have BTDT.

In the meantime it's 10PM here in New England. It might be a Sunday nite, but that's when people have time to get on the air. Most of the conversations are mundane. Most of them...