

## **Digital Training Session 4.**

This is the fourth and last part in a series of training sessions on the use of digital communications in Harris County.

This part discusses whether you should use Airmail or Paclink for packet messages. Here are the major points courtesy of Tom N5TW in Round Rock.

### ***Paclink vs. Airmail***

I have received a number of queries on why we use Paclink here. Both Paclink and Airmail are very worthwhile programs with (somewhat) different uses. Below is the text for a note I recently sent out on this topic. I hope this will be informative and generate thought on your area's overall system design:

We actually use both but mostly Paclink. Airmail has its place - it is the only program that can do point to point communications and that can be important - our strategy was to have a local PMBO that can hub with a total loss of the Internet and a bevy of Telpacs so the odds of needing point to point locally is small - nevertheless, we have Airmail installed everywhere and do occasionally practice that. Airmail's also the only program that does HF and we use it for that. Some folks like Airmail because it does not need Win XP or 2000 to work - I find that rather unconvincing given how long these OS systems have been out there and given the fact that older computers are just going to be less reliable over time.

But here are my arguments for Paclink:

(1) It supports the AGW Packet Engine that lets us use cheaper TNCs or sound cards where Airmail has only a limited set. I'm not a big fan of sound cards as these can be touchy but the TNC-X TNCs work great and cost around \$70 - we would not have nearly the number of volunteers capable of going portable without using PACLINK for this reason.... This reason will eventually go away as Airmail is working on an AGW interface...

(2) We run Telpac Internet gateways at all our hospitals and EOCs - this gave us many more Telpacs with different Internet suppliers and with emergency backup power. Airmail (until it gets the AGW capability) cannot share a TNC. Running Telpac and Paclink on the same computer with the same radio and TNC works great... That is a compelling reason to run Paclink at these installations! (Again, we do have Airmail installed just in case...)

(3) Paclink supports other computers on the network using Paclink as an e-mail server - our goal ultimately is to have some non-hams in EOCs using the system when their's fails - we have not gotten to that point but it is a goal... Can't do that with Airmail.

(4) Paclink lets you use regular e-mail programs - I am just more productive on regular e-mail software and the learning curve for putting a volunteer on the keyboard is zero. Airmail is pretty easy but it is still different...

(5) I like the backup auto connect sequences supported by Paclink. We have our EOCs using a the local PMBO via Telnet as a first priority and a distant PMBO as a second. If both of these are out, odds are the Internet is down at the site and we then default to a series of other Telpacs using Packet. Works slick!

So some of these arguments for Paclink will go away when Airmail supports the AGW PE... Hope this helps!

Tom N5TW

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This ends the series on the use of digital communications in Harris County. In these sessions, we have seen:

- When to use digital messages
- An overview of the digital network
- Operating guidelines
- Station guidelines
- Whether Airmail or Paclink is more suitable for your packet messages

These digital guidelines will, and should, change regularly as more opportunities arise. If you have any comments or suggested changes, please let your EC know or email them direct to [kb2wf@yahoo.com](mailto:kb2wf@yahoo.com)