

Monitoring Winlink Messages

To over simplify things a bit, there's a debate right now about Winlink with respect to our inability to monitor traffic between other parties. When someone sends you a message over the air, you receive it in your inbox, but other hams watching the exchange will only be able to see the callsigns involved, the subject line, and a few other things. The body of the message, though, will appear to them as a compressed mess of gibberish.

The petition to the FCC asks in part that:

The FCC should require all digital codes to use protocols that 'can be monitored in entirety by third parties with freely available, open-source software.'¹⁾

That sounds very reasonable and in principle you can easily imagine that if a program like Winlink can easily decompress a message for one recipient, it could just as easily decompress all the messages it hears. It would simply be a matter of managing these messages in a way that is easy for the user to filter what is theirs and what isn't.

Well, it seems that there's been some progress in decoding off-the-air messages recently:

This is a reasonable step forward as proof of concept. [...] I hope to further the work to yield a functioning monitoring tool for those with interest in monitoring the Winlink system. [...] It's clear to me this capability will be warmly received by all parties in the debate [...]

The Winlink monitorability nut is cracked. Privacy on radio Winlink no longer exists... and that's a very good thing for all parties.²⁾

It's pretty cool that someone managed to reverse engineer the compression algorithm and packetization scheme, but again, I think Winlink should be forced to offer this feature in their program so that everyone can monitor every winlink message they can hear on the air.³⁾

Check out [this thread](#) for the still ongoing development.

¹⁾

[Is Ham Radio a Hobby, a Utility... or Both? A Battle Over Spectrum Heats Up](#), July 8, 2019

²⁾

[Re: Addendum to previous exhibit1 demonstrating off the air \(OTA\) monitoring of a Winlink email exchange](#), August 13, 2019

³⁾

This is my personal option and doesn't represent the Club's view - [Patrick, VE7HZF](#) 2019/09/07 23:22