

February 15, 2021 LeeCARES Net Training:

What3words

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This is KI5ABB. Tonight's training is on a different way to identify your location. What3words is an app that has gained popularity in Europe

What3words is a [proprietary geocode system](#) designed to identify any location with a resolution of about 3 meters (9.8 ft). It is owned by What3words Limited, based in [London](#), England. The system encodes [geographic coordinates](#) into three permanently fixed dictionary words. For example, the front door of [10 Downing Street](#) in London is identified by `///slurs.this.shark`. What3words differs from most [location encoding systems](#) in that it displays three words rather than strings of numbers or letters.

What3words Ltd. has a website, apps for [iOS](#) and [Android](#), and an [API](#) for bidirectional conversion between what3words addresses and latitude/longitude coordinates.

What3words was launched in July 2013. The creators conceived the idea while struggling to get bands and equipment to music venues using inadequate address information. They tried using GPS coordinates to locate the venues but decided that words were better than numbers after a one-digit error led to the wrong location. They credit a mathematician friend for the idea of dividing the world into three-meter squares, and a linguist with using memorable words. The company began in 2013.

What3words divides the world into a grid of 57 trillion 3-by-3-metre squares, each of which has a three-word address. The addresses are available in forty-seven languages.

Translations are not direct, as direct translations to some languages could produce more than three words. Rather, territories are localized considering linguistic sensitivities and nuances.

Each what3words language uses a list of 25,000 words (40,000 in English, as it covers sea as well as land). The lists are manually checked to remove [homophones](#) and offensive words. The company claims that densely populated areas have strings of short words due to more frequent usage; while less populated areas, such as the North Atlantic, use more complex words.

The system's advantages are memorability, error-detection, non-ambiguity of words for most every day and non-technical uses, and voice input.

In February 2020, in Scotland, the system was first used by stranded walkers. That month, in Australia, it was also first used in a rescue operation.

In June 2021 [Mountain Rescue England and Wales](#) raised concerns about the credibility of reported What3words coordinates, following incorrect information being given about 45 locations over 12 months. Spelling issues and local accents were reported as being part of the problem.

I first learned of What3words in 2018, when it was used in a plot line of [NCIS: Los Angeles](#). While there are some criticisms and weakness to the system, it is a good idea for us to be aware of how it works and be prepared to adapt if we should happen to encounter it's use during an event or while making contacts (especially with Europe).

Just for reference the EOC can be located by `///spooking.stump.coasting` and Elm Creek Café can be identified by `///harder.unrated.lambs`.

This concludes tonight's training. This KI5ABB. Back to Net Control.