

Field Day promotes emergency preparedness, hobby of amateur radio

By Martin de Vore | Posted: Monday, June 22, 2015 11:40 am

It's a familiar image: a lone radio operator in a small shack braving 100 mph winds to get messages out to the rest of the world as a hurricane or other natural calamity ravages the surroundings. Although that mythos endures, the reality is much more complicated, especially in southeastern Texas.

Now, networks of amateur radio operators work together with government agencies, emergency personnel and service organizations to keep information flowing in and out of areas battered by natural or manmade disasters.

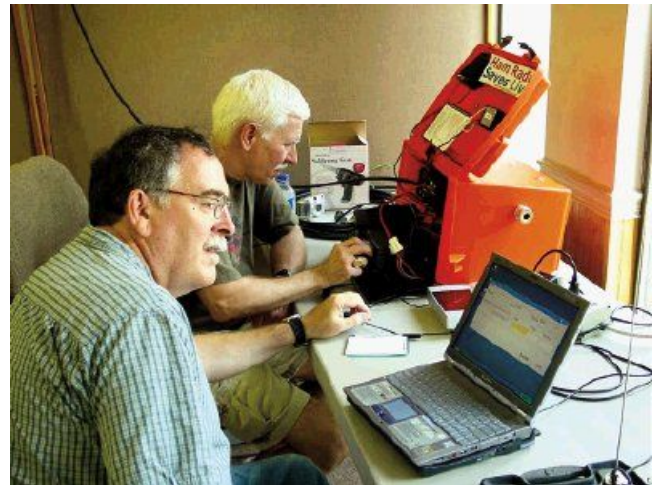
These radio operators, or "hams" as they are sometimes known, are involved in this process at the national, state and local levels.

To keep those skills sharp, they get together yearly for an event known as Field Day. Held in numerous locations worldwide, local Field Day activities will take place on the Lone Star College-Kingwood campus Saturday, June 27 and Sunday, June 28.

Hosted by Texas Emergency Amateur Communicators (TEAC) and Lone Star College-Kingwood's engineering program, all activity will take place in the Performing Arts Center (PAC) room 125.

"The doors open at 9 a.m. Saturday to the public, stay open until 5 p.m. and the actual Field Day event starts at 1 p.m. CST and goes until 3:59 p.m. Sunday," explained John Nobile, LSC-Kingwood student and TEAC member. "Club members will be making radio contacts for the duration, a 26-hour event actually. The doors open again Sunday at 10 a.m. to the public and remain open until 3 p.m. If anyone is wanting to join the club, they may do so this weekend at the event. The roles of amateur radio operators has actually increased in the last few years. Come out and find out why."

Nobile, whose call sign is N6ZP, continued, "Amateur radio allows for all kinds of people of all nationalities to communicate, learn science and advance many of today's technologies and just communicate. From those on the Titanic to my grandfather's cousin Umberto Nobile, many people have been saved by others that have been ham radio operators. Hams provide a vital link when the communication infrastructure breaks down. Many people today falsely believe that their cell phone



Field Day promotes emergency preparedness, hobby of amateur radio

Pictured at a recent Field Day are Bruce Bayley, KC5ABR, logging contacts on the computer (front) and John Psimas, KE5MSE, at the radio (back).

(based on the ham technology of repeaters) or landline will save them. What they do not realize is that if something happens such as a ‘Carrington Event’ where a solar flare disrupts the power grid, cell towers will lose their battery backup power within 36 hours or less if there is no generator and that’s if they are lucky enough to have battery backup. In addition, landlines now utilize a copper to fiber converter and require commercial power. They also have battery backups but will fail within days. Unless someone is prepared, they will have no means of communications other than broadcast radio and newspapers. Amateurs pride ourselves on being prepared and having an alternative power source. Just knowing where a radio is won’t help if you are not practiced at using it.”

In the United States, Field Day — always the fourth full weekend of June — is typically the largest single emergency preparedness exercise in the country, with over 30,000 operators participating each year. Since the first American Amateur Radio League (ARRL) Field Day in 1933, radio amateurs throughout North America have practiced the rapid deployment of radio communications equipment in environments ranging from operations under tents in remote areas to operations inside Emergency Operations Centers (EOCs).

Field Day operators will show the public the benefits of radio to use as basic communication or during real emergency events such as hurricanes, earthquakes, terrorist attacks, or any other situation where normal communication is unlikely. Community members interested in operating a radio on a particular frequency band or learning more about amateur radio equipment are invited to participate in the event.

“Field Day for me has always been the preparing and deployment of antennas and radios in some sort of environment that is not usually used as such,” said Nobile. “So I guess for me, it’s a test of our ingenuity and endurance for equipment and people, which for most hams is just plain fun. It always involves food and public showcasing and more importantly operating radio. It also gives the members an opportunity to meet our families and spouses. Older hams enjoy recruiting and teaching younger hams. Some older guys look forward to the food and the discussions that follow while others look forward to making as many contacts as possible.”

And those contacts can be international, national, statewide or local. That all depends on what kind of license and equipment the radio operator has.

“A Technician Class license allows you privileges to operate on 80 meters (3.525 through 3.6 Mhz) utilizing CW (Morse Code),” Nobile explained. “There are privileges on 40 meters, 15 meters and 10 meters, all of which have very good propagation of radio waves around the globe depending on weather and solar activity. One portion on 10 meters allows voice for Technician Class amateurs. Another avenue of communication open to amateurs, including those with Technician Class licenses, is satellite communications which utilize VHF and UHF. Each step up in a license class allows you more bandwidth and privileges such as voice and data communications. TEAC offers classes sporadically throughout the year but when there is enough interest, we do organize classes and test

dates at local facilities throughout the area, from Humble to Porter.”

According to Nobile, TEAC is a good organization to belong to for those who wish to pursue their interest in amateur radio.

“This is the largest amateur radio club that I know of in the area and we encourage all to join — whether you are a licensed amateur radio operator or not,” Nobile said. “We meet at Christ the King Lutheran Church on West Lake Houston in Kingwood on the first Saturday of the month at 8 a.m. unless otherwise posted on our website, www.TEAC.net. It is a great hobby for the blind, for scouts, for preppers, outdoors and maritime enthusiasts also.”

Okay, let’s say that someone attends Field Day and catches the amateur radio bug. There will be expenses involved, both for licensing and equipment. But according to Nobile, becoming involved in amateur radio does not have to mean a trip to the poorhouse. Nobile says that the cost depends on what you want to do and what you can afford to spend.

“The license itself is free and the fee for the administration of the exam is at the discretion of the organization giving it, although it’s usually not expensive,” Nobile said. “There are currently three license classes: the Technician Class, General Class and Amateur Extra. As for equipment, a small VHF/UHF radio can be had now for less than \$50. Many of the members of the club have them. You can spend thousands for very high end radios or piece together parts and build your own for very little. It all depends on your intentions and aspirations for the hobby. If someone would like to price equipment before getting involved, there’s a great local brick and mortar store called Houston Amateur Radio Supply located at 2558 FM 1960 between Humble and Spring. Their website is <http://harsradio.com/> and their phone number is 281-355-7373. They always have great deals on their products and are comparable to online sales which will require shipping and no service whatsoever.”

Scheduled Field Day participants include members of TEAC and Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES) – a national amateur radio association with more than 60 members in the area. Types of communication to be practiced include HF Radio – High Frequency communications, VHF Radio – Very High Frequency communications, UHF Radio – Ultra High Frequency Communications, Digital Comms, Packet Comms, TV Comms and Go-Kit Comms.

Field Day at Lone Star College-Kingwood is open to the public and is free of charge. Free parking will be available. For more information on the Amateur Radio Field Day at LSC-Kingwood, email John Nobile at JNOBILE@my.lonestar.edu or NE Harris County ARES emergency coordinator and TEAC member John Igoe at jigoe4249@gmail.com. For more information about TEAC, visit their website www.TEAC.net. For more information on licensing requirements and amateur radio in general visit ARRL’s website <http://www.arrl.org/>.