

IMPORTANT MESSAGES

World War II Coast Watchers scanned the skies and seas for enemy movements and radioed their reports from hidden, portable locations. Then they packed up and scrambled to avoid capture. They got the important messages through.

When disasters strike, such as the Great Alaska earthquake in March 1964, the first casualty is the telephone system. That earthquake collapsed structures across south-central Alaska, triggered massive tsunamis, and killed 139 people. No help was coming until some hams pieced together makeshift stations and got the news to hams outside the area, who then alerted officials.

Often, large outdoor events like marathons and bicycle races count on ham radio crews to track the participants, make sure the aid stations are well-staffed and -supplied, and coordinate help when someone gets lost or hurt. The racers feel safer because they know the hams can get help when needed.

All those scenarios rely on radios and operators – often outdoors in the field – getting the critical messages through.

FIELD DAY

One way to encourage radio hobbyist to stay ready to fill in when all else fails is to hold fun contests. Folks will do anything if it's fun, meaningful, and earns them some points. Field Day is an *activity*, not a contest, though, because there are no winners or losers. Communication requires people to cooperate, not compete. Points earned just make it more fun and easier to measure our progress year by year.

So in June and January, we hold a Field Day to tote our gear into the field, set it up, and contact as many other stations as we can. Summer heat and winter cold pose different obstacles, so hams challenge ourselves under both conditions.

Field Day runs 24 hours on a weekend. That forces us to master more than just radio stuff. An overnight exercise teaches us leadership and organizational skills; planning; scheduling round-the-clock coverage; logistics like food, shelter, fans in the heat and heaters in the cold; and field sanitation.

Field Day teaches us to be a sturdy communications unit, not one that wilts within a few hours.

ON THE AIR

We didn't send critical messages today, but we earned some points and got dopamine hits by proving that we could, if needed.

We exchanged our radio call signs, the types of operations we were running, and gave our locations. Routine stuff, but placeholders for important messages.

A Field Day station can be one person running a low-power radio off a small battery. Or it can be a handful or dozens of hams using generators or batteries with multiple, powerful transmitters.

It can even be someone operating from home, or a group activating their city, county, or state Emergency Operations Center (EOC) ham station. In disasters, field stations need help that a "base" station can provide. So we exercise both roles.

We earn one point for each station we talk to by voice. Since Morse code (also called "CW") requires more skill and experience, those earn two points. Besides, a CW operator with headphones can rack up points late at night without disturbing sleepers nearby. Bonus!

CAN I PLAY, TOO?

Yes, and we really like when you do!

We get LOTS of extra points when non-hams sit down, learn how it's done, and make contacts on the air. We call it "Get On The Air (GOTA)".

Hams talking to one another is fine. But filling our community's communications gap can mean connecting community members with someone *they* need to talk to. We call it "third-party" messages. So putting a third-party person like you on the air simulates us bridging that gap, and that's a banner day for us!

COULD I BE A HAM?

Sure, if you want. You can pass the multiple-choice test and earn a license from the federal government. Children, teenagers, and other non-technical people pass the test all the time after some focused study.

Morse code is no longer required, so you don't have that hurdle.

Books, classes, and online sample tests are available to help you. Google™ to find them.

If you need help, contact me.

WHAT DOES "HAM" MEAN?

"Hams" are not named for the tasty meat.



Instead, it was an insult that Radio Amateurs embraced as a nickname.

The term most likely came from the early commercial radio operators who prided themselves on their precise, quick Morse code. They looked down their noses at the awkward, *ham*-fisted amateurs who made lots of mistakes.

But the amateurs learned radio craft through trial and error, and became more proficient and innovative than the commercial pros. Perfection ridicules mistakes; excellence leverages them to do better than perfect.

Field Day lets us learn and excel.

"HAM" RADIO FIELD DAY

Thank you for visiting us today. One of our goals is to satisfy curious people like you.

You saw licensed Amateur Radio Operators ("hams") contacting one another by radio in an event called "Field Day". Ham radio is a community that enjoys applying science, technology, engineering, and math in practical ways on 2-way radio.

Field Day prepares us to respond when normal communications fail. One of our government-mandated jobs is to fill that communications gap for our communities when trouble strikes.

If you have follow-up questions, contact me.

Name: _____

Callsign: _____

Phone or e-mail: _____