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Amateur Radio Operators Adapt to COVID-19 Crisis

Santa Rosa, CA – June 12, 2020 – The last full weekend in June is a big one for tens of thousands of amateur radio operators all over North America. It's Field Day weekend, a combination emergency-preparedness exercise, public relations event, and club picnic. Clubs and individuals tune up their power generators and charge their batteries and get on the air to make radio contacts with other participants. It's normally a pretty big deal for the Sonoma County Radio Amateurs, or SCRA, the amateur radio club in Santa Rosa, CA. The club sets up four separate stations in the Santa Rosa Youth Community park just west of Piner High School and draws well over 100 participants.

This year's club event is yet another casualty of the COVID-19 crisis, but that's not deterring SCRA members from participating in this year's Field Day. Many are planning to set up and operate emergency-power and alternate-power stations from their homes.

For example, Bill Dornbush, amateur radio callsign AA6BD, plans to set up a temporary station in his travel trailer. The station will include a 100 watt transceiver (transmitter/receiver combination) and a temporary antenna that he'll attach to the front of his trailer. To power the transceiver, he plans to use the batteries that are part of his trailer, and are charged using its solar panel.

To make contacts, Dornbush plans to use a variety of different modes, including voice and digital communications. Digital communications provide a way to connect to other radio amateurs more effectively than voice in many instances.

Dornbush notes that one of his objectives is to ensure that his equipment will be operational, and should a real emergency occur, that he can send and receive messages. "Even if the power goes out," he says, "I should be able to keep in touch using batteries charged with my solar panel."

2020 marks the 82nd annual Field Day event. It was started in 1933 by the ARRL, the national association for radio amateurs, and has been held every year since then, except for the years 1942 – 1946, when amateur radio was suspended during WW II. There are currently more than 750,000 licensed radio amateurs in the U.S., who donate the equivalent of millions of dollars per year providing emergency and public service communications.

For more information about Field Day, the SCRA, or amateur radio in general, contact Bill Dornbush, AA6BD, email: bill@dornbush.net, phone: 707-888-2799.