

Ham radio operators put their skills on display this weekend at Field Day

BIG BEND - Thousands of ham radio operators will be showing off their emergency capabilities this weekend.

Over the past months, the news has been full of reports of ham radio operators providing critical communications in emergencies worldwide. During the recent tornados and in Hurricane Katrina, amateur radio – often called “ham radio” - was often the ONLY way remaining by which people could communicate.

When trouble is brewing, ham radio people are often the first to provide critical information and communications. On the weekend of June 28-29, the public will have a chance to meet and talk with these ham radio operators and see for themselves what the amateur radio service is about.

Showing the newest digital and satellite capabilities, voice communications and even historic Morse code, hams from across the USA will be holding public demonstrations of their emergency communications abilities.

This annual event, called "Field Day" is the climax of the week long "Amateur Radio Week" sponsored by the ARRL, the National Association for Amateur Radio.

Using only emergency power supplies, ham operators will construct emergency stations in parks, shopping malls, schools and back yards around the country. Their slogan, "When all else fails..." is more than just words to the hams as they prove they can send messages in many forms without the use of phone systems, internet or any other infrastructure that can be compromised in a crisis. More than 34,000 amateur radio operators across the country participated in last year's event.

Members of the Big Bend Amateur Radio Club will participate in the event, as they have for over 35 years. Members of the club, who come from Brewster, Jeff Davis and Terrell counties as well as guest operators from as far away as Houston, will begin setting up stations and antennas at 1 p.m., June 27.

Beginning at 1 p.m. on Saturday the hams will try to contact as many other stations in the U.S. and Canada as they can.

“This is a good chance for the public to view amateur radio in operation,” said club president Billy Roberts, W5NPR. “Our club prides itself on our focus on public service and by participating in field day we get another opportunity to plan and rehearse for the possible public emergency where we might have to provide emergency communications support.”

Last year, about 20 hams contacted over 2,000 stations in the event. The test is at the Pavilion behind the sales office of the Double Diamond Ranch south of Alpine on Highway 118.

There are 654,000 Amateur Radio operators in the US, and more than 2.5 million around the world. Through the ARRL, ham volunteers provide emergency communications for the DHS Citizens' Corps, Salvation Army, FEMA and hundreds of state and local agencies, all for free.

To learn more about amateur radio, go to www.WeDoThat-Radio.org. The public is most cordially invited to come, meet and talk with the hams. See what modern amateur radio can do. They can even help you get on the air!