

How To Get Emergency Communications Experience?

We've talked about the need for Amateurs to provide Emergency Communications, the kind of communications required, and the skills needed, or not needed, to be a useful volunteer. The next question for many people, is how can I gain experience with emergency like communications conditions?

Some minds have already leapt to Field Day, and 30 years ago that might have been a reasonable answer. Today, the best way to gain emergency communications experience is with community service events like the Tour Nortel and the Canadian Ski Marathon.

Conditions for Community Service events are very similar to emergency communications conditions;

- It is local communications (VHF/UHF)
- There are many stations working as a team on the same frequency
- There is a net control station and they play an important role
- You have to go where the organization needs you, which may not be where it is convenient for you and radio communications.
- You need to establish and maintain effective communications with the other stations. One quick check in is not enough.
- You may need to be prepared and creative, in order to establish communications from your location.

Working at Community Service events is a great way to realize that you really aren't prepared. What worked for your location last year may not be sufficient for your location this year. Over time you gain experience and a kit of supplies that allows you to solve almost any situation. Many of the things you need are not complicated. It might be realizing that an antenna on a 3 metre mast can make a big difference and that you need at least 3 metres of coax cable to do that.

While Field Day is still promoted by many groups as the great demonstration and test of Amateur radio emergency communications capability, linking Field Day with emergency communications fails to promote the real benefits of field day and provides a negative view of amateurs to the emergency planning community.

Field day is a great event. It gets amateurs out of the shack, working together at something we all enjoy. It provides an excellent opportunity to promote the hobby to the public with demonstrations of different modes and bands, showing people how Amateur radio can communicate with different places.

Field day is not a great demonstration of emergency communications. Emergency planners are not looking for people to set up in tents, they want them

inside buildings with the rest of the people. Talking briefly to Sable Island is cool, but clients are looking to communicate from a shelter to City Hall and the Red Cross.

So if you want to improve your understanding and ability to provide communications in an emergency, look for community service events. They are a great learning opportunity. If you want to have some fun and demonstrate the joy of Amateur radio as a hobby, mark field day in your calendar so you don't miss it.

Next Month: What kind of equipment is required for emergency communications?

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