



For Immediate Release
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Power Out? Cell Towers Down? Meet the Heroes of Emergency Communication!

Ham Radio Operators Deploy to North Fort Myers for 24-Hour Drill

FORT MYERS, FL – May 25, 2026 – When a severe hurricane strikes Florida, the state’s massive digital infrastructure—cell towers, fiber-optic internet, and power grids—often fails due to high winds, catastrophic storm surges, and prolonged blackouts. In those critical moments when conventional networks go completely dark, amateur (or "ham") radio operators step in, serving as the ultimate off-grid communications safety net to bridge the gap and save lives.

To ensure local volunteers remain sharp and fully prepared for the upcoming hurricane season, the Fort Myers Amateur Radio Club (FMARC), together with Lee County Amateur Radio Emergency Service (LeeARES®), will host its annual ARRL® Field Day exercise. The public event will kick off at noon on Saturday, June 27, 2026, and run continuously for 24 hours until noon on Sunday, June 28, at the North Fort Myers Community Park, located at 2000 Recreation Park Way, North Fort Myers.

Sponsored nationwide by the American Radio Relay League (ARRL), Field Day is the most popular on-the-air ham radio event in the U.S. and Canada, drawing over 31,000 participants annually. The event functions as both a rigorous emergency preparedness exercise and a vital community outreach opportunity, proving how amateur radio can maintain flawless operational capability under primitive, post-disaster conditions.

Simulating Post-Disaster Operations

During the 24-hour drill, FMARC operators will establish temporary, fully functional radio stations entirely outdoors to simulate a compromised disaster zone. Key components of the exercise include:

- **Emergency Power Solutions:** All radio equipment will run independent of the public power grid, utilizing portable generators, heavy-duty batteries, or solar panels to model response capabilities during localized or grid-wide power outages.

- **Deployable Antennas:** Teams will rapidly erect temporary, portable wire and directional antennas to adapt to fluctuating atmospheric conditions and across multiple radio frequencies.
- **Establishing Lifelines:** Operators will compete to log contacts with as many global and domestic stations as possible, earning points for technical resourcefulness, alternative power usage, and the deployment of advanced digital communication technologies.
- **Public Education & "Get On The Air":** The local community is highly encouraged to attend. Visitors can observe emergency operations firsthand, ask questions, and even transmit over the airwaves under the direct supervision of a licensed operator.

A Proven History of Saving Lives in Florida

The practical necessity of this training is proven by real-life emergency responses during recent Florida natural disasters. Because ham radios operate completely independent of the commercial grid, organizations like the Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES®) provide irreplaceable services when emergency infrastructure collapses:

- **Ground-Truthing for the National Hurricane Center:** Before landfall, the Hurricane Watch Net (HWN) utilizes High Frequency (HF) bands to relay real-time weather data directly to meteorologists in Miami, filling the data void when official weather sensors are destroyed.
- **Manning Emergency Operations Centers (EOCs):** During historic catastrophes like Hurricane Ian (2022) and Hurricane Idalia (2023), when public dispatch networks failed, ARES volunteers stationed at Florida county EOCs manually transcribed and radioed urgent requests for high-water rescues.
- **Hospital and Shelter Lifelines:** When Hurricane Michael (2018) devastated the Florida Panhandle, isolating multiple medical facilities, ham operators deployed directly to hospitals and Red Cross shelters. Utilizing digital packet radio, they securely transmitted critical pharmacy needs and resource requests back to the state EOC.
- **Search and Rescue Coordination:** Following Hurricane Irma (2017) in the Florida Keys, ham operators embedded with search and rescue teams, providing the exact geographical coordinates of trapped residents to direct emergency air ambulances through compromised fields.

Whether routing life-or-death tactical logistics or passing "Health and Welfare" messages via the National Traffic System (NTS) to assure worried families that their loved ones are safe, amateur radio remains an irreplaceable pillar of public safety.

About ARRL Field Day

ARRL Field Day is a nationwide event held annually to demonstrate the value of amateur radio in providing emergency communications and public service. Field Day is a showcase for how amateur radio works reliably under any conditions from almost any location to create an independent communications

network. "Ham radio functions completely independent of the Internet or cell phone infrastructure, can interface with laptops or smartphones, and can be set up almost anywhere in minutes. That's the beauty of amateur radio during a communications outage," says Bob Inderbitzen, NQ1R, spokesperson for ARRL, the national association for Amateur Radio, (www.arrl.org), which represents amateur (or "ham") radio operators across the country. "In today's electronic do-it-yourself (DIY) environment, ham radio remains one of the best ways for people to learn about electronics, physics, meteorology, and numerous other scientific disciplines, and is a huge asset to any community during disasters or emergencies if the standard communication infrastructure goes down," Inderbitzen adds. Anyone may become a licensed amateur radio operator.

About the Fort Myers Amateur Radio Club Inc. (FMARC)

Founded in 1957, FMARC is an ARRL-affiliated, nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting amateur radio through comprehensive education, formal training, and dedicated community service. The club fosters fellowship among radio enthusiasts while maintaining an unwavering emphasis on public service during times of crisis.

About Lee County Amateur Radio Emergency Service (LeeARES®)

The Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES) is a public service organization sponsored by the American Radio Relay League. Its members are licensed Amateur Radio Operators who have voluntarily registered their qualifications and equipment to provide emergency communications as needed, and communications support to public service events. (Membership in ARRL is NOT a requirement to join ARES nor is membership in any amateur radio club required. It is open to ALL licensed Amateur Radio Operators.)

Additional Information & Resources

- FMARC Official Website: www.fmarc.net
- Field Day Details & Inquiries: www.arrl.org/field-day or email fieldday@fmarc.net
- Lee County ARES Information: www.leeareas.com

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