

How to Succeed in Field Day By Really, REALLY Trying! Helpful Field Day Tips

Here are some helpful hints that ought to help you plan and set up for your Field Day operation. Although every Field Day setup is different, and everyone has a different way of doing things, these tips should at least point you in the right direction.

Safety Tips

Safety First! Follow the ARRL safety code as you set up. Appoint a "safety officer" and charge them with making sure no accidents happen. See elsewhere in this packet for information on the 100-point bonus for a Safety Officer for Class A stations.

More people are killed by contact with regular 120-V line service than by any other voltage. The voltages in many power supplies can be lethal! Don't take any chances! Ground anything and everything. Never use "three-prong" adapters to connect your equipment to your power source. Remember, the power coming out of your generator is as lethal as the AC plugs at home!

Grounding or anchoring! Whether a private residence, public park or farmer's field, when putting in ground rods (or digging/anchoring), check in advance with your local municipality (often that's by dialing 811) to confirm your intended installation is installed safely!

Have someone always on hand that is qualified in First Aid and CPR. This is a good idea for any club project. Contact your local American Red Cross chapter for more information on learning these valuable skills.

Always kill all power circuits completely before opening up a piece of equipment and trying to troubleshoot it. Never allow anyone else to switch the power on and off for you while you're working on something. Never try to fix something while you're tired or sleepy. If you're working on older tube-type gear, or an amplifier, always unplug the unit from the AC mains and wait at least 5 minutes before you begin. When troubleshooting this kind of equipment, always keep one hand in your pocket, as a precaution against accidental shock. Never wear watches or jewelry when you're working on gear.

NEVER climb any tower without the proper equipment: a hard hat and a climbing belt are musts. NEVER climb an un-guyed tower. NEVER work on a tower alone. Always have someone on the ground to watch you. Always make certain that all mechanical connections are tight and secure before erecting a tower or an antenna. What may be easy to fix on the ground could be dangerous in the air. When erecting a tower, take your time and be safe! It's far too easy for someone to get caught on something, or have fingers or toes in the wrong place at the wrong time. Make certain any "spectators" are a safe distance away should something happen. Always make sure your guys are securely anchored, and that the guys themselves are sufficiently taut. Tying flags to guy wires in strategic spots will help prevent people from walking into them (especially visitors!). Make certain that the tower bases are secure and unlikely to shift in high winds.

Alcohol and towers do not mix! If you drink, don't climb! If you climb, don't drink!

Watch out for overhead power lines! Make certain they are at least twice the height of any antenna's height in distance away: an antenna 50' high should be at least 100' from any overhead line, for example.

Make certain that your group has enough fire extinguishers, and that everyone knows where they are. **Always keep a multipurpose fire extinguisher by the generator. Never fuel a running generator.** Never smoke around a generator. Keep the fuel in a separate place away from the hot generator. Charge one or two people with the responsibility of monitoring the generators. **Generators should always be kept outdoors in an area with good air circulation.** This will prevent the possibility of exhaust and gas fumes building up.

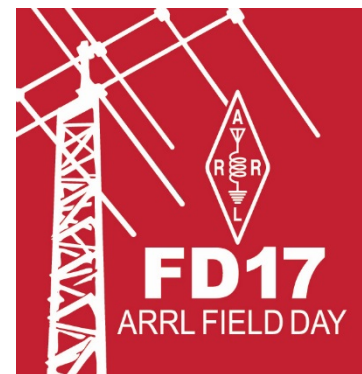
Check all your extension cords prior to setup for signs of wear or fraying. Discard any that show even the slightest wear. Guard all outlets from any water. Make sure the wire sizes are adequate enough to handle the load.

Watch out for lightning! Storms can develop and move quickly. At the first sign of a storm, disconnect all antennas from the rigs, shut down the generators, and head for shelter. You don't have to take a direct hit in order to sustain damage, or electrical shock. Summer thunderstorms are accompanied by high winds and rain. **Play it safe!** Consider having someone designated to monitor weather conditions with the authority to take appropriate actions should dangerous weather threaten your Field Day set-up.

During an overnight operation, **make sure that there is adequate security for those involved, including adequate lighting.** More than one Field Day operation has discovered too late that equipment has been permanently "borrowed" from an operating position left unattended during the wee-hours of the morning.

Setup

Check out your operating site ahead of time. Avoid confusion on Field Day by preparing a work plan. You'll want to determine where antenna, power sources, and operating positions should be placed. Coordinate in advance the order for each task. Make sure that all essential items will be on hand when they are needed. Don't forget the essential creature comforts, such as trash cans, toilet paper, flashlights, bug spray, first aid kit, etc.



Nothing can kill the Field Day enthusiasm faster than not having sufficient help to set-up and tear-down the site. **Sign up your volunteers early. Be proactive in soliciting volunteers. Don't just say "we need help." Personally invite individuals to participate (i.e. "Pete I could really use your help as the 10meter Phone band captain.)**

Always have designated "tour guides", that is, persons ready to guide any visitors who might happen by your site and show an interest in ham radio. This is also a good way to drum up interest in a class. Not only is this a chance to show off your hobby in a favorable light, but it is also worth some bonus points! Set up a table with some handouts about ham radio, your club, and Field Day. Type up a sheet that describes your club, the operation, and include a person to contact for more information. When giving a tour, make sure not to lapse into "ham speak": try to explain what people doing in easy-to-understand language. **Avoid Jargon!**

If the media comes by, **make certain that something is going on.** TV, radio and print journalists will be much more impressed to see antennas going up and people making contacts than they will by a group of people sitting around drinking beer. Make sure you have someone designated to be the guide for any visiting news media or VIPs.

Many clubs "turn out the operators" by combining Field Day with family activities, such as a picnic. Others send a mailing to all their area hams with a map to the FD site along with some information. **Be creative!** In your community there are always those who would love the chance to come and participate. Consider organizing volunteers who would pick up older hams who may not drive at night or might not have a ride. Telephone "lapsed" club members with a personal invitation. What ham can ignore a good covered dish supper?

Give everyone something to do. Newer hams can do 2-meter talk-ins, help operate a GOTA station, or help assemble antennas – *but also spend time with them, Elmering them through some on-the-air contacts at the main station.* The more people are involved, the better time you will all have. This is a great chance to give some of your newer hams some practical experience. **Do what it takes to get the new hams ON THE AIR** - after all, Field Day is a great opportunity for new hams to learn how to operate!

Keep a handy list of ARRL section abbreviations at every operating position. This will eliminate possible confusion later on. If everyone uses the same abbreviations, you'll save yourself some headaches when it comes time to check over the logs. The full list is included in this packet.

Make sure everyone keeps up the dupe sheets or logging duties. If you have operators who have never used one, sit them down with someone beforehand to show them how it's done. **Consider a club program before Field Day to familiarize your members with logging, duping and operating. There are numerous free computer logging programs for Field Day. Find one, learn it and use it. Trust me, it will simplify your life.** Finally, before the actual start of operating, have a final "participant briefing" so that all involved know the necessary safety and operational information. It's a great way to officially kick off the weekend!

Operating

Keep an ever-constant eye on 10 and 6 meters. If those bands open up, you should have lots of stations to work. If the band is quiet, don't assume that it's dead. Throw out a CQ or try to stir up interest. Everyone else could be listening, too! Remember: all licensed amateurs have some type of HF-operating privileges on 10-meters and almost all have 6-meter privileges..

Listen around on the bands the week before the contest. This gives you a good idea of what to expect in the way of propagation during Field Day. Check your logs from previous years and see if you can spot any trends, i.e. hours when certain bands were open, or had a high level of activity. Certain bands in certain areas can be extremely important in working up a good score. For example, 40 meters on the East Coast is a bread and butter band for Field Day while 6-meters almost always has great openings in late June. Decide which bands are going to be the most important to your score and try to maximize your effort on them by using the best antennas possible combined with your best gear and best operators.

Don't ignore one mode for another. Many groups have concentrated on CW only to miss out on some easy Phone contacts, and vice versa. **Digital modes are the fastest growing area of Field Day contacts.** Always keep in mind that every contact counts, no matter what the mode.

Read the rules very carefully. Look over the bonus points available. A number of these could be relatively easy to earn. If your club has any traffic handlers, they could easily help you earn the message bonus. Copy the W1AW bulletin! This is an easy 100 points. W1AW and K6KPH come on the air several times each day to give you an extra chance to copy the message. Remember! Every 100 bonus points you earn are that many QSOs you wouldn't need to make to have the same score.

On Using Computers and Logging

Check out your software ahead of time. Make certain that it works on all the computers you'll be using. If you're using a software package that allows networking stations (i.e. more than one computer tied together) make sure that they can communicate with each other before Field Day starts. Have a sheet available with the most commonly used commands. Consider a meeting where everyone can sit down and become familiar with the computer and software before Field Day. Also, have a sheet available at each station with a list of the ARRL/RAC Sections for easy reference. And don't forget to have some "emergency" logging and dupe sheets in case of computer failure. **Make sure your computer has the proper date and time set** before operating. This will save you many problems in the long run. And remember, for your submission to ARRL you just submit a list of stations worked by band and mode, not a complete log, so Cabrillo is not required.