

# Radio operators ready for emergencies

**[Brian Wilkinson](#) /Sierra Star**

Radio operator Ken Nobles, front, and recorder John Bodwell, members of the Mountain Amateur Radio Club, make contacts across the United States during their Field Day shift.

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**Local** ham radio operators recently gathered at the home of Alan and Buna Gil on Road 620 overlooking Oakhurst to set long-distance-contact records and practice their emergency-communication skills during a 24-hour period.

Members of the Mountain Amateur Radio Club worked around the clock June 26 through June 27 to set up field radio communication stations, get on the air and contact other operators in the United States and Canada as part of their participation in the American Radio Relay League's annual Field Day.

"Field Day is a way for hams to get outdoors and have fun while fine-tuning emergency communication skills," said Dick Rekart, emergency preparedness chairman of the Mountain Amateur Radio Club. "We use a 2,000-watt generator and battery power, and we set up antennas in the field. The idea is to put together a self-sufficient work station quickly and begin making contacts in the unlikely event of an emergency situation in which normal phone, Internet or radio communication networks are not available."

The American Radio Relay League's field organization has been effective in establishing emergency communications during floods, hurricanes, fires, earthquakes and other major disasters.

"Ham radio operators have assisted with every disaster in the country over the past 100 years, including more recent events like Hurricane Katrina, Sept. 11 and the Oklahoma bombing," Rekart said. "When normal communications go out, ham operators can get on the air almost immediately."

The Oakhurst Field Day was coordinated by Rekart and Alan Gil.

Rekart said in addition to club members developing their skills, Field Day is used to acquaint the general public with the capabilities of amateur radio.

The 24-hour effort by the local club consisted of 376 hours of work by 22 radio operators and radio loggers who kept track of all the contacts made.

The group effort resulted in 222 contacts in 34 states, including Hawaii and three contacts in Canada.

Members of emergency organizations, such as the Amateur Radio Emergency Service and the Radio Amateur Communications Services, regularly participate in Field Day.

The club works with Cal Fire and the Madera County Sheriff's Department as needed. Club members were scattered throughout the Mountain Area during the July 4th weekend to watch for people using illegal fireworks or any fires. The club set up a radio base station at the Cal Fire station in Mariposa.

The club, with 58 members, also assists with communications during area bike races, parades and search and rescue operations.

"We do these activities as public service to our community," said Gil.

Janet Stanovich, emergency services coordinator for the sheriff's department, said the group is able to supply a valuable service to the area if communications ever went down.

"They assist with communications during our emergency disaster drills and are very self-sufficient."

According to Rekart, more than 35,000 ham operators participate in Field Day every year across the country.