

Cook County ARES NET Training--2014/06/25

Field Day Safety

Field Day is upon us this coming weekend. I hope everyone has a fun and safe Field Day.

Here are some things to keep in mind to keep your Field Day safe.

A careful, thorough site survey should be performed before starting any work at your Field Day site to identify any hazards--on the ground, in the air and sky, and, possibly, in any water that may be present. Mitigate or fence off hazards where possible. Otherwise, mark the hazards clearly with something that will be visible. Caution tape is available at big-box home improvement stores. Consider the location of tents, generators, antennas, antenna supports, and the like, in view of these hazards. If your site design places a hazard in a high-traffic location, it's time to relocate something.

Remember that members of your group, and visitors, may be roaming the site in the dark. Mark existing hazards with something that will be visible. Consider providing lighting. A string of Christmas tree lights sometimes works well.

Consider appointing a safety officer. Safety is everyone's responsibility. Appointing a safety officer does not absolve everyone else of that responsibility. A safety officer provides a second or third pair of eyes looking at each operation and may catch problems that others miss. In addition, assigning a person an official role to maintain a safety vigil gives that person license to speak up when a problem is observed, where others may be reticent because they do not wish to interfere.

When erecting towers, masts, ladders, and similar support, do it safely and carefully.

Anything going up in the air should be kept far, far, far away from power lines.

Have the right number of people. Don't attempt to do a 2-3 person job with one person.

Have enough guy lines. Mark them.

If you're planning to use a light pole as part of your antenna support system, consider that an electrical fault can put dangerous voltages on any conductive parts.

Be careful with generators. They can produce electricity at potentially dangerous voltage and current. Store and handle fuel responsibly and safely. Keep fuel containers out of the sun and out of enclosed spaces. Do not fuel generators while running. Locate generators away from tents and other occupied places to avoid exposing personnel to exhaust.

Be careful with batteries. Overcharged batteries can explode. Even properly charged batteries can emit flammable or explosive gases. Flooded-electrolyte batteries contain dangerous acid which can leak if the battery is disturbed or damaged.

Be careful about where you place power cables and feedlines. Consider that dry areas may be flooded in heavy rains.

Consider the weather. There's a chance of thunderstorms both Saturday and Sunday this year. Prepare a bad weather plan and familiarize everyone with it. Storms can come up unexpectedly, or perhaps while you're not paying attention. I've seen more than my share of tents and other Field Day facilities blown down or over, and I've also seen impromptu creeks running through tents in or after storms.

Have a safe place to go when bad weather is imminent--preferably a sturdy building that provides shelter against both wind and lightning.

Your plan should have a procedure for determining when to shut down and go to the shelter.

It is human nature that people want to save their expensive radios and computers. Knowing that, furnish a few garbage bags in each tent or operating position that can be used to protect expensive items in transit to the shelter, so that personnel are not wasting time looking for something for that task.

As you approach the end of your set-up process, perform another site survey to identify, mitigate, and mark hazards that you have created. Consider guy lines, power cables, transmission lines, tent stakes and lines, grounds rods, and anything else that might present an obstacle or hazard. An inverted bucket over a stake or ground rod provides a visible monument that's hard to miss.

Make sure tents or other operating positions have adequate shade and ventilation for personnel, and furnish plenty of drinking water.

Finally, be especially careful when it's time to clean up. Some staff are likely to be especially tired after the weekend's activities and may be tempted to take dangerous shortcuts.

Again, I wish everyone a fun, and safe, Field Day.