



# Radio-Active!

March 16, 2026, Volume 5 Issue 3

## Beware the Ides of March... and Celebrate the Power of Connection

“Beware the Ides of March” is a phrase that has echoed through history since the days of ancient Rome. On March 15, 44 BC, Julius Caesar was assassinated — an event that reminds us how quickly circumstances can change when warnings go unheard and communication breaks down. While the Ides of March is often remembered for intrigue and betrayal, it also offers a timely reflection for amateur radio operators: the critical importance of awareness, readiness, and reliable communication.

Ham radio has always thrived at the intersection of history and preparedness. Long before smartphones, satellites, and fiber optics, radio amateurs proved that a simple signal sent through the air could connect people across towns, states, and continents. Even today, when modern systems fail or become overloaded, amateur radio continues to stand ready as a resilient and independent means of communication.

The lesson of the Ides of March is not just about caution — it is about paying attention. In emergency communications, awareness is everything. Situational reports, weather updates, and status checks all depend on operators who are listening carefully and ready to act. A missed call sign, an unheard transmission, or an unmonitored frequency can be the difference between clarity and confusion. As hams, we train ourselves to listen first, verify information, and pass it accurately—skills that matter both in daily nets and during real-world emergencies.

March is also a fitting time to recommit to preparedness. As winter transitions into spring, storms, flooding, and other seasonal hazards remind us why ARES exists.

- Do your radios still perform as expected?
- Are your batteries charged and your go-kits up to date?
- Have you reviewed local frequency plans and contact lists?

The Ides of March can serve as a gentle warning—not of impending doom, but of the need to stay ready before the unexpected arrives.

Beyond emergencies, ham radio represents something Caesar never had: open, cooperative communication across borders and backgrounds. Amateur radio operators share knowledge freely, assist strangers without hesitation, and build community one contact at a time. Whether checking into a weekly net, helping with a public service event, or making that first HF contact of the day, each transmission reinforces the bonds that make our hobby—and our service—so valuable.

So as March 15 comes and goes, do not just beware the Ides of March—embrace what it represents. Stay alert. Stay prepared. And keep the airwaves alive with clear, calm, and capable communication. In a world where systems can fail without warning, amateur radio remains a trusted voice when it matters most.

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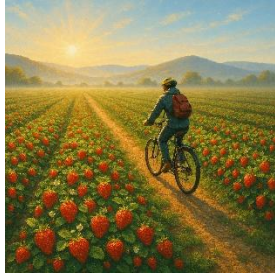
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## Santa Cruz County ARES Purpose

- The Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES) consists of licensed amateurs who have voluntarily registered their qualifications and equipment with their local ARES leadership for communications duty in the public service when disaster strikes.
- We are not fire fighters or police or sheriff's officers. We are volunteers who care about our communities by using our emergency communication skills.
- Before volunteering in an emergency, we first take care of ourselves, our family, and our home.
- We value every member's contribution, irrespective of license class, years of experience, or the price tag of equipment.

## Event season beginning – Strawberry Fields



We again have an opportunity to provide communication support for the Strawberry Fields Bike Ride on Sunday, May 17th. We are asking for sign-ups two months before the event to allow time to purchase the T-shirts. This event is available to all hams and counts as an ARES event participation event. You do not have to be an ARES member to volunteer.

There are four rest stops that will require one or two radio operators, plus opportunities for those with vehicles that can transport bicycles safely (SAG drivers) and SAG ride-along. If you do not have a vehicle that can transport bikes, we can pair you with one of the non-ham SAG drivers. See article on page 3 for more details about the SAG system.

Below are the possible assignments (with last year's rest stop hours); however, changes could occur.

- Burrell CalFire station 0830-1030hrs
- Calfee Design 0800-1330hrs
- Royal Oaks Park 0830-1430hrs
- Gizdich Ranch 0900-1530hrs
- Pajaro Valley High School (net control and other assignments) 0700-1730hrs
- Gravel course - <https://www.cyclistsforculturalexchange.org/2025-cce-sff-first-gravel>
- SAG vehicles' hours are 0800-1700 both as drivers and ride-along but SAG drivers can work partial shifts.

### You will need to sign up twice.

1. Here is the link to our sign-up form: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0D4DA9A822A4F4CE9-62939044-2026> If you have a favorite assignment, there is a place in the sign-in form to request it.
2. Also, the ride organizers would like us to sign up on their site: <https://www.bikereg.com/strawberry-fields-forever>. Note: They ask for our birthday, I think it is to establish that we are over 18. I personally alter my birthday in a memorable way. For example, Jan 1st, 1960, becomes Feb 2nd, 1961. Of course you can put your actual birthday.
  - a. Click on "**Volunteers**"
  - b. At the bottom, enter your email then click on "**Register**".
  - c. Fill in your Name, Address, etc. Leave "**Team Website**" blank.
  - d. Select "**Communications**" for your "**Volunteer Position/Team**" even if you plan on driving SAG.
  - e. When you select your T-shirt size. Note that they tend to run two or three sizes small. I selected "XXL" to get a Large (I hope). *(This list has styles 1 and 2 but we only choose style 1)*
  - f. *There is a hold harmless agreement from BikeReg.com that you must click through.*
  - g. On the "**Review Order & Checkout**" page, select "**CONTINUE**".

# Report your volunteer hours!

The reported volunteer hours for January were 573 hours. Please remember to enter your hours on the form on <https://xczcomm.com/index.php/hours-reporting/>

Reporting the time you spend on ARES and ham radio activities reminds county public safety managers that we are around and ready to serve in time of need.

## What is a SAG?

SAG stands for **S**upport and **G**ear. A SAG typically provides:

- Rider assistance for cyclists who are injured, exhausted, or unable to continue.
- Bike transport, carrying disabled bicycles and riders to the next rest stop or the finish.
- Mechanical help, such as dealing with minor bike issues until a rider can reach a rest stop.
- Course coverage, helping event organizers maintain awareness of rider locations and conditions.



In ARES-supported events, SAG vehicles often include:

- Licensed amateur radio operators as drivers or ride-along
- Direct radio contact with net control, rest stops, and event coordinators
- Real-time reporting of rider status, medical needs, and course conditions

This radio link allows organizers to respond quickly and coordinate resources across the course, increasing rider safety and overall event effectiveness. Radio operators can expect to spend the day monitoring radio traffic (on multiple frequencies depending on location), communicating clearly with net control, and coordinating rider assistance with event staff. Situational awareness is key — watching for participants who may need help, noting road or weather hazards, and providing timely updates.

Many SAG assignments use APRS, allowing net control to track SAG locations in real time and dispatch the closest unit when help is needed. Even when APRS is in use, voice radio remains essential for accurate reporting and coordination. Besides supporting bikes events like the Sea Otter Classic and Strawberry Fields Forever, SAGs are often used for running events such as The Big Sur Marathon and Santa Cruz Triathlon.

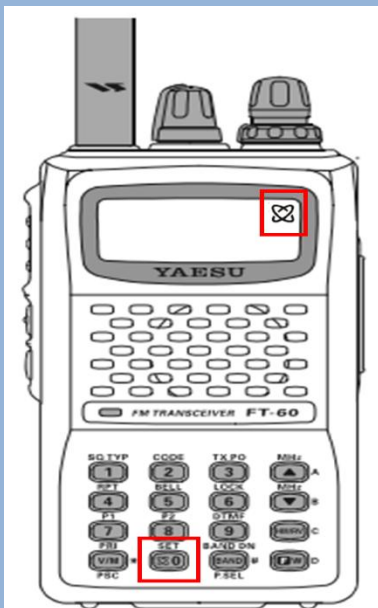
A SAG is the event's safety net on wheels—quietly patrolling the route, ready to help participants when something goes wrong, and serving as a critical communication link during organized events.

## Resources

- Website: <https://xczcomm.com/>
- Reporting volunteer hours: <https://xczcomm.com/index.php/hours-reporting/>
- Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/ARES-of-Santa-Cruz-County-Ca-296232310799866>
- Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/431308973875528>
- PIO Articles: <https://arlsantaclara.valley.org/news/> or <https://xczcomm.com/index.php/news/>
- Submitting personal information such as DSW application, personal data update, education certificates, PDFs of deployment documents: email to [EOC.ARES@santacruzca.gov](mailto:EOC.ARES@santacruzca.gov)
- Santa Cruz Communications Support offers four loaner kits for ham operators: two for vehicle deployment (mobile dual-band radio, mag mount antenna, battery, kneeboard) and two for stationary outdoor use (vehicle kit plus tripod antenna, lighting, and pop-up). To borrow a kit, contact John (N6QX), Roberta (AJ6KN), Stephen (KM6NEP), or Dan (N6RJX).

## Disabling Wires

1. Verify radio is unlocked.  
To unlock—Long press #6
2. Press the F/W key (lower right button) then immediately press the 0 key to enter the menu mode.
3. Rotate the Dial knob to menu 23 – INT MR.
4. Press the F/W key then rotate the Dial knob to select a memory (d1 through d9) that is empty, i.e., it contains ●●●●●● (six dots) = no tone.
5. Press the F/W key to store the setting.
6. Rotate the Dial knob to menu 21 – I NET.
7. Press the F/W key then rotate the Dial knob to select INT.MEM.
8. Press the F/W key to store the setting.
9. Press the PTT button to exit the menu mode.



## Yaesu WIRES

*(A repeat article from July 2024 - it is left here as a resource)*

So, you bought yourself the Santa Cruz County ARES recommended Yaesu FT-60 Handi-talkie. You programmed it to our frequencies. Then you start participating in Nets and events. And you try to transmit. Either you are not heard at all, or the first part of your transmission is cut off. Net control asks for a repeat of the information, but this time hears a DTMF tone at the beginning of your transmission. Net control or other listeners may chime in and state the station (you) has “Wires” turned on. How did that happen? *Very easily*. Most of us have experienced this phenomenon with this radio.

Yaesu’s WIRES stands for **W**ide-coverage **I**nternet **R**epeater **E**nhancement **S**ystem. It is an internet communication system that allows amateur radio repeaters to connect over Voice over IP (VoIP). WIRES uses DTMF signaling to connect, so any radio with a DTMF encoding keypad can be used to establish an internet link. When your radio sends out the DTMF tone, it simultaneously mutes your voice audio (or lowers it significantly). That is why Net Control, and the rest of the Net cannot hear you! When you are saying your call sign, the radio has muted or lowered your voice signal. Additionally, most repeaters automatically mute the audio when they hear DTMF tones, cutting off the user. The person making the transmission has no idea what is happening other than a small, easy to miss indicator on their display.

WIRES is a feature that is well used elsewhere but has had challenges in getting a foothold in the US. According to some, the introduction of Echolink or Allstar may have influenced this.

On the FT-60R, which uses WIRES-II technology (and not the current X version), the key that is used to turn on WIRES is the “0 Set” key, located on the bottom row, second from the left (see diagram to left). Press it momentarily to turn WIRES on (or off). You might do this by accident if you want to enter Set mode and forget to first hit F/W key. You can tell WIRES is on if the small ‘atom’ symbol appears in the top right corner of the display. When participating in an event, we encourage locking your radio after setting your frequencies for the event and verifying the WIRES is not active.

If you do not plan to use this feature, consider an alternative way of handling it by following the steps in the left-hand column. After performing the steps, it is still possible to ‘activate’ the WIRES and the symbol will appear, *but it will not send tones over the air and mute your audio!*

## Testing, Testing! – part 2



On **Tuesday, April 7th, beginning at 7:00 PM**, Santa Cruz County will conduct a repeat of the emergency communication exercise to evaluate the effectiveness of two-way radio links between various local groups and the County Emergency Operations Center (EOC). Participating organizations include Firewise, Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT), and neighborhood groups. There have been lots of updates to the radio equipment at the EOC and we hope it is a better experience for all. Also, attempts are underway to increase the number of group respondents. At the start of the test, operators at the EOC will use amateur radio station W6XCZ to transmit a test message to all participants via the following repeaters:

ARES Chan	Repeater	Frequency	TX Offset	PL Tone	Location
5	WR6AOK	147.120 MHz	+ 600 kHz	94.8 Hz	Ben Lomond Mountain
6	K6BJ	146.790 MHz	- 600kHz	94.8 Hz	Upper DeLaveaga Park
8	K6RMW/W	147.945 MHz	- 600kHz	94.8 Hz	Watsonville Hospital
40	W6TUW	145.290 MHz	- 600kHz	94.8 Hz	Bonny Doon

### Instructions for Participants:

- After receiving the test message, designated ham operators should relay it to as many neighbors as possible.
- Next, contact the EOC by radio and report: the name of the neighborhood group, the number of individuals in the group who confirmed receipt of the test message and (Optional) any additional test message you wish to send back to the EOC.

## New Local Option for Exam Testing!

Upgrading your amateur radio license just got easier for hams in Santa Cruz County and the Monterey Bay area with a new group, SURF Exams, an ARRL-accredited Volunteer Examiner (VE) team. The team emphasizes an organized, welcoming testing environment staffed by experienced volunteer examiners who understand the needs of today's amateur radio community. One of the biggest changes candidates will notice is the tablet-based testing format. Instead of paper forms and pencil-filled bubbles, examinees take their test on a provided tablet by simply tapping their answers. Results are available immediately, and all exam paperwork is filed electronically. For those who cannot attend an in-person session, SURF Exams notes that they can refer candidates to an established online testing option through a partner VE team that specializes in remote exams. If you—or someone you know—are ready to earn your first amateur radio license or take the next step, SURF Exams offers a convenient and modern path right here in our area. To learn more about upcoming sessions and the testing process, visit <https://surfexams.net>.

## MEMBERSHIP MEETING

**Try something different this time and step up your game.**

Our next ARES meeting is scheduled for **Wednesday, March 18, from 7:00 to 9:00 PM**, and will take place outdoors in the parking lot of the County EOC at **5200 Soquel Ave., Santa Cruz**.

### Why outdoors?

We are bringing back the popular Comm Post Message Passing Exercise! Set up your go-kit in the parking lot as if you are establishing an emergency communications post in a location without power or phone service. You will send and receive short, tactical messages—just like in a real emergency. For a comprehensive go-kit checklist, see: <https://xczcomm.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/PSPS-Go-Kit.pdf>.

**Try something different this time and step up your game.**

You and a partner can use one of the loaner mobile kits we have at the EOC.

# Equine Evacuation Exercise

On Sunday, March 15, several ARES members joined Equine Evac for a joint amateur radio exercise that included participants from both the Santa Cruz and Santa Clara County Equine Evacuation Teams. The group met at the Santa Cruz County Horsemen’s Showgrounds and spent approximately 60 minutes reviewing standard radio operations and on-air etiquette. Members also had the opportunity to have their radios reprogrammed with the latest frequency list.

Following the review, participants divided into eight teams and were dispatched to locations across the grounds. Each site presented a scenario involving planned animal evacuations as well as unexpected challenges. Teams reported their findings over the radio and were then reassigned to additional locations. The exercise highlighted several key lessons learned, including the proper use of tactical call signs, when to identify with FCC call signs, managing open microphones, and the importance of patience during periods of heavy net activity.



## Who are Equine Evacuation?

This organization is a volunteer group, under the County’s Animal Services division, capable of assisting with the evacuation of large animals during disasters such as fires and flooding. In 2008, during the Summit, Martin, and Trabing fires, the team helped evacuate more than 500 horses. During the CZU Fire, they again evacuated numerous large animals—including horses, donkeys, and llamas—and also supported a feeding program for animals that could not be relocated. In addition, the group has played an important role in helping ranch and animal owners develop disaster and evacuation plans and share this information with the Equine Evacuation Team.

The organization consists of approximately 150 volunteers and 8–10 trailer teams. About 30 members are licensed amateur radio (ham) operators; however, the group does not currently conduct formal or regularly scheduled training

# Activities – Save the dates

## 2026 SCC ARES Events

Date	Event	Approx. or confirmed date?	Description
May 17, 2026	Strawberry Fields Forever Bike Ride	Confirmed	Strawberry Fields Forever is an annual benefit bike ride through some of the most beautiful regions of Santa Cruz County. ARES provides comms between rest stops and SAG vehicles. See article with links
June 22 - 26, 2026	Santa Cruz Regional Active Shooter and Casualty Care Response Training	Approximate	This event is sponsored by the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's department and provides first responder training for an active shooter. ARES along with CERT provides perimeter monitoring in maintaining a closed event location.
July 4, 2026	Aptos 4th of July Parade	Approximate	We provide monitoring of the public to provide information to the Sheriffs
8/16/2026 (est)	Race through the Redwoods	Approximate	Race through the Redwoods is a 10K foot race that starts and finishes at Roaring Camp but the majority traverses the redwoods in Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park. It is promoted by the Felton Business and Community Association. ARES provides monitoring of runners positions and safety for the organizers.
9/20/2026 (est)	Santa Cruz Triathlon	Approximate	Santa Cruz Triathlon is a non-profit that donates proceeds to various athletic programs in the county. ARES provides monitoring of participants positions and safety for the organizers.
October 30, 2026 (est) 1530 - 2030	Halloween Trunk or Treat 5200 Soquel Ave, Santa Cruz	Approximate	Trunk of Treat is organized by the Santa Cruz Sheriffs. ARES provides monitoring of participants along with closed road staffing and shuttle parking location.

## 2026 Other Radio Events for Ham Operator Participation

Date	Event	Approx. or confirmed date?	Description
Each Wednesday 10am - 12pm	Loft Coffee 2701 Cabrillo College Dr, Aptos		Gathering of general interest, sharing of ideas, getting some elmer help
2nd and 4th Saturdays of the month 10am	C.A.K.E. @ Loft Coffee 2701 Cabrillo College Dr, Aptos		C.A.K.E. = Coffee/Caffeine Assisted Knowledge Exchange. Gathering of general interest, sharing of ideas, getting some elmer help
1st Saturday of each month [3/7/26] 10am - 2pm	POTA	Approximate	Play radio at a scenic park near by. Not formal and any mode can be used. Emails sent prior to event to indicate the specific park.
April 16 - 19, 2026	Sea Otter Classic	Confirmed	Large scale bicycle event that takes place at the Laguna Seca Raceway and Park, Monterey
April 26, 2026	Big Sur International Marathon	Confirmed	Point to Point foot race/run along Highway 1 from Big Sur to Carmel. Ham radio operators provide communications along the route.