



Radio-Active!

February 16, 2026, Volume 5 Issue 2

Strengthening Community Resilience



On Thursday, February 12th the airwaves came alive on multiple repeaters. Over 250 county residents took part in a successful emergency communications test, connecting neighborhoods across Santa Cruz County without relying on phones or the internet. Led by dedicated volunteers from ARES, the exercise demonstrated how quickly vital information can be shared during a crisis—and revealed the power of community collaboration.

At exactly 7:00 PM, Roberta, AJ6KN and John, N6QX initiated a planned radio test from the County Emergency Operations Center. Ham

radio operators in twenty-eight neighborhood groups, including Firewise and Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) received and relayed a test message, reaching hundreds of residents in minutes. The ham radio operators used local short range unlicensed radios (mostly the multi-use radio service – MURS) to relay the test message to individuals in their neighborhood groups and collect their responses.

This rapid response highlighted the effectiveness of local radio networks and the readiness of our community to act when traditional communication channels fail. The event also highlighted opportunities for improvement, such as enhancing radio room operations and strengthening short-range communications within some groups. These insights are already fueling discussions and plans for future tests, ensuring that our emergency response grows stronger with every exercise.

Why Participate?

- **Be Prepared:** Learn how to stay informed and connected during emergencies.
- **Build Connections:** Meet neighbors and volunteers committed to safety.
- **Make a Difference:** Your participation helps identify and solve real-world challenges.

Whether you are a seasoned ham operator or simply interested in community safety, your involvement is vital. Watch for announcements about the next test and join us in making Santa Cruz County more resilient, together!

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This Week:

Free Ham Radio Technician License Class set to start 2/19/26. Encourage family and friends to get their license. Sign up here:



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.

What is VOAD and Why Does It Matter?

When disaster strikes, the strength of our community lies in how we come together. A VOAD—Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster—is a coalition of local, faith-based, nonprofit, and community organizations that unite to support disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. Rather than acting alone, VOAD members coordinate their efforts to ensure help reaches those who need it most, efficiently and effectively.

The Purpose of VOAD

VOAD's mission is to foster communication, coordination, collaboration, and cooperation—the “4 Cs”—among its members. This approach prevents duplication of services, fills gaps in aid, and ensures that resources are used wisely. VOAD does not provide direct services itself; instead, it brings together organizations with unique skills and resources, aligning their efforts for the greatest impact.

While the national VOAD organization was founded in 1970, local county-level VOADs in California often organized around major disaster events in the decades following. There has been a resurgence of Santa Cruz County VOAD since the CZU Lightening Complex Fire.

How VOAD Works in Our Community

Locally, our VOAD partners include organizations like ARES, CERT, Firewise, Community Bridges, American Red Cross, food banks, faith groups, Volunteer Center of Santa Cruz County, and many others. They work closely with the Santa Cruz County Office of Response, Recovery, and Resilience (OR3). During recent emergencies, such as mass food distribution events and atmospheric river floods responses, VOAD members have worked side by side—coordinating volunteers, sharing information, and supporting long-term recovery. VOAD meetings and educational sessions help train volunteers and strengthen relationships before the next disaster strikes.

Currently VOAD is working with some recent grant awards - \$20,000 for translation services and \$30,000 for MURS & ham radio equipment expansion for Firewise groups.

Why Get Involved?

- **Build Resilience:** By joining VOAD, ARES becomes part of a trusted network ready to respond when disaster hits.
- **Share Resources:** Pool knowledge, volunteers, and supplies for a more effective response.
- **Stay Informed:** Access training, best practices, and up-to-date information on local preparedness and recovery efforts.



Upcoming Opportunities

Watch for announcements about upcoming VOAD meetings and training sessions. Whether you represent an organization or want to volunteer, your participation helps make our community safer and more resilient for everyone. For more information or to join our local VOAD, contact the VOAD CBO Liaison at cboliaison@scc-voad.org.

Report your volunteer hours!

The reported volunteer hours for January were 544 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 the Volunteer Center?



The Volunteer Center of Santa Cruz County is a central resource and "one-stop shop" for community service in the region, operating as both a connector

for local volunteers and a direct service provider through over twenty unique programs. Founded in 1967, it aims to turn compassion into connection by helping individuals and businesses find meaningful ways to serve over three hundred local nonprofit partners.

The center bridges community gaps through specialized divisions that address diverse needs:

- **Volunteer Matching:** Offers match-making appointments to pair one's skills and interests with the right opportunities.
- **Empowered Aging:** Provides six programs for seniors, including Helping Hands for home repairs and Stay Connected for remote companionship.
- **Community Connection:** A mental health division offering counseling, career coaching, and support for adults with co-occurring disorders.
- **YouthSERVE:** Connects middle and high school students with volunteer projects like graffiti removal and community clean-ups.
- **Friends Outside:** Supports incarcerated individuals and their families with re-entry planning and restorative justice services.
- **Disaster Response:** Coordinates large-scale volunteer efforts during local emergencies, such as wildfires and floods.

The local impact is vast and impressive with the following stats.

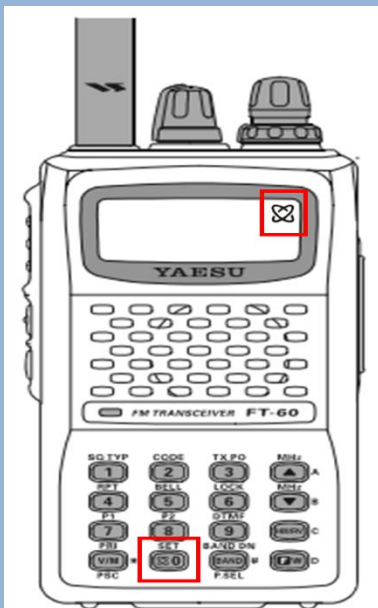
- **Mobilization:** Annually connects over 15,000 volunteers to more than five hundred community partners.
- **Direct Support:** Provided services to over 9,000 residents in need during the past year alone.
- **Economic Value:** Generated approximately \$11 million in donated labor for the local economy last year.
- **Santa Cruz Gives:** Spearheads a holiday giving campaign that raised over \$1 million for local nonprofits in 2023.

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://arrlsantaclaravalley.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
- 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 WIRE

(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 WIRE 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). WIRE 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.

WIRE 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 WIRE-II technology (and not the current X version), the key that is used to turn on WIRE is the “0 Set” key, located on the bottom row, second from the left (see diagram to left). Press it momentarily to turn WIRE 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 WIRE 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 WIRE 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 WIRE and the symbol will appear, *but it will not send tones over the air and mute your audio!*

Understanding REV

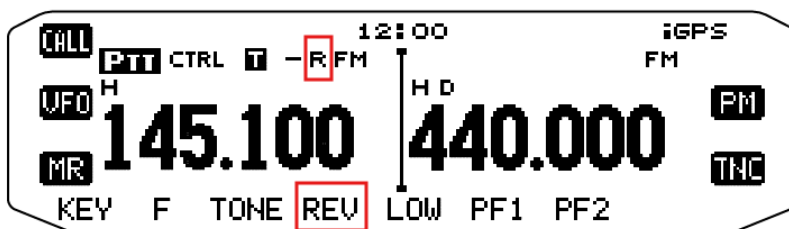
If you have spent time operating on amateur radio repeaters, you have noticed the “REV” or “Reverse” button on your radio. But what does it do, and why is it important for both new and experienced operators?

In ham radio, REV stands for “Reverse.” Its primary purpose is to swap your radio’s transmit (TX) and receive (RX) frequencies. This feature is most useful when communicating through a repeater, where you normally transmit on an “input” frequency and listen on an “output” frequency. Mastering the REV button is a key skill for net control operators and anyone participating in repeater-based communications. It enhances situational awareness, improves troubleshooting, and supports efficient use of shared radio resources.

Pressing the REV button allows you to listen on the repeater’s input frequency. This simple action unlocks several powerful capabilities:

- **Check Simplex Range** - By monitoring the input frequency, you can determine if you are close enough to another operator to communicate directly (simplex), without the repeater’s help. If their signal is strong on the input, consider switching to a simplex channel—freeing up the repeater for others and improving efficiency.
- **Troubleshoot Weak Signals** - Sometimes, a station may be trying to access a repeater but is not strong enough to “trip” it. If you are physically closer to them than the repeater is, you can hear them on the input frequency and relay their message. This is especially valuable during nets or emergency operations, where every message counts
- **Locate Interference** - The REV function can help you pinpoint the source of interference. By listening to the input frequency, you hear the direct signal from the interfering station, rather than the repeater’s retransmission. This can help you identify the general area of the interference and take steps to resolve it.

Understanding the visual and audio cues will assist operators in understanding if REV is being used. Reference the two tables to the right for some of those details.



Visual Indicators on the Display

Most modern handheld (HT) and mobile radios have a specific indicator for reverse mode.

- **The "R" Icon:** Many radios (like Baofeng, Kenwood, Yaesu) will display a small letter "R" on the screen when reverse is active.
- **Frequency Check:** Toggle the reverse button (often the * or SCAN button on HTs). If you see the frequency change from the output frequency (e.g., 146.940) to the input frequency (e.g., 146.340), you are in reverse.
- **"-" or "+" Shift Change:** If your radio shows the offset direction (like -600), activating reverse may make the shift indicator disappear, change to a different sign, or flash, indicating you are listening to the input, not the output.

Audio/Signal Cues

- **Loss of Repeater Tail:** When you unkey, you typically hear a "courtesy beep," "kerchunk," or "squelch tail" from the repeater. If you are in reverse, you will likely **not** hear this, or it will be much quieter/noisier.
- **"Simplex" Audio Sound:** The audio may sound different—more like a direct radio-to-radio signal (higher noise floor, less "processed" sound) rather than the clean, strong audio of a repeater.
- **Hearing Only One Side:** If you are in a conversation and you can only hear one person (the one closer to you) but not the other person or the repeater controller, you are likely listening to the input frequency.

Activities – Save the dates

2026 SCC ARES Events

Date	Event	Approx. or confirmed date?	Description
May 17, 2026	Strawberry Fields Forever Bike Ride	Approximate	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.
June 2nd or 3rd week, 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.