

Frequently Asked Questions about SKYWARN Recognition Day

1) *What is SKYWARN Recognition Day?*

SKYWARN Recognition Day (SRD) was developed in 1999 by the National Weather Service and the American Radio Relay League. It celebrates the contributions that volunteer SKYWARN radio operators make to the National Weather Service. During the day SKYWARN operators visit NWS offices and contact other radio operators across the world. Information regarding SRD is updated at <http://hamradio.noaa.gov>.

2) *Why are the National Weather Service and the American Radio Relay League cosponsoring the event?*

The NWS and the ARRL both recognize the importance that amateur radio provides during severe weather. Many NWS offices acquire real time weather information from amateur radio operators in the field. These operators, for example, may report the position of a tornado, the height of flood waters, or damaging wind speeds during hurricanes. All of this information is critical to the mission of the NWS which is to preserve life and property. The special event celebrates this special contribution by amateur radio operators.

3) *When is SKYWARN Recognition Day?*

This year SKYWARN Recognition Day begins at 0000 UTC on December 5, 2009. It will last 24 hours.

4) *How many NWS stations are participating in the event?*

It is estimated that around 100 NWS stations will participate this year.

5) *What frequencies and modes will be utilized?*

Each NWS station will transmit on different frequencies and modes depending on the individual capabilities at each site. Check the internet for specifics. Most stations will operate on 80, 40, 20, 15, 10, and 2 meters using phone operations. However, some sites will utilize other modes including PSK-31, RTTY, packet, and CW. The use of repeaters to make contacts is allowed. VoIP modes like IRLP and Echolink are also encouraged.

As always, radio operators must conform to the rules and regulations as stated by the Federal Communication Commission. For example, operators may only utilize frequencies for which they have been licensed.

There are no band plans given for the event. All contacts will be made utilizing the general or novice portions of the bands. The use of the extra portion of the bands may be used if band conditions get crowded and the control operator has the necessary privileges.

6) Can repeaters be used to make contacts? We use them frequently during real weather emergencies.

Yes, repeater contacts are allowed.

7) We only have VHF capabilities in our NWS office - mainly 2 meters. Can we still participate in the event?

Yes. However, having HF capability is encouraged to allow more amateur operators to work your station.

8) How will I know that our station is officially registered as a SRD station?

Check the internet site at <http://hamradio.noaa.gov>. When your station is listed, you are officially registered. Contact Matt Mehle (Matthew.Mehle@noaa.gov) to obtain a registration form.

9) Is this a contest or what?

No, this is not a contest, so no scoring will be computed. This is simply a group of stations transmitting from NWS offices during the same time. Similar event occurs every year on the amateur radio calendar. For example, hams operate from lighthouses across the world during one weekend and from naval ships/submarines during another.

10A) Should NWS stations contact only other NWS stations?

No, absolutely not. You should contact as many other amateur radio operators as possible.

10B) Can NWS stations contact other NWS stations?

Yes, absolutely yes.

10C) Now, I'm really confused!

OK, here is the answer in a nutshell. Contact as many radio operators as you can, including (but not limited to) all other NWS stations.

11) How many contacts do you expect each NWS station to make?

The answer is - who knows? It will be a function of radio propagation during the event, the skill of the station operators, the equipment and modes that are being utilized, the number of hours on the air, and...well, you get the idea. Some stations may make less than 100 contacts - others may make over 1000.

12) Our operation will be located on airport grounds. Why do I need to inform the airport manager of the event?

Although the chance of amateur transmissions interfering with airport communications is unlikely, you need to ensure this is the case. You may do this by conducting tests in a controlled setting to see if interference is a problem. You should send a letter to the airport manager describing what will take place. If the manager objects, you may move your operation off-site. Airport communications are critical to public safety and must not be jeopardized. There were no reports of interference problems during last year's event.

13) Will the radio equipment produce interference on NWS systems (computers, radar, etc.)?

Again, the chance of interference to NWS equipment is unlikely. There were no reports of interference to NWS equipment during last year's event. There are two things to remember, however. 1) The amateur radio operators must not interfere with NWS operations in any unacceptable way. 2) If an NWS shift leader requests that SRD operations be terminated at the local office, terminate it immediately.

14) We want to acquire a special 1X1 call sign (e.g., N0A). How do we get it?

A 1x1 call sign is an identifier with one letter, one number, and another letter. For example, N0A is a 1x1 call sign. Many special event stations utilize a 1x1 call sign. The process is easy to obtain one. Simply visit the ARRL web site at www.arrl.org/arrlvec/1x1.html and complete the application form. Of course, you can also use a club call sign or the call sign of the control operator. Just be sure to use the same call sign during the entire event.

Many stations already have call signs with a WX prefix (e.g., WX0GLD), and you are encouraged to use that.

15) QST magazine usually lists Special Event stations in a compiled list every month. Will our station be listed there?

If you want your individual station to be listed in the Special Event section of QST magazine, you must submit your information following the ARRL submission policies. You can go to www.arrl.org/contests/spev.html for complete information on how to do this. Remember, though, the deadline to get this information to QST is fast approaching.

16) How should NWS offices conduct the contact?

Almost every contact is unique (which is one of the fun aspects of amateur radio!), so it's almost impossible to give an appropriate answer. Remember, you must exchange your signal strength, location, and current weather. Here is an example using WX0GLD as the NWS station:

SRD Station (WX0GLD): CQ CQ CQ. This is special event station WX0GLD calling CQ and standing by.

Answering Station (W1AW): WX0GLD, this is W1AW.

WX0GLD: W1AW, thank you. This is WX0GLD celebrating SKYWARN Recognition Day. Your signal report is 59. I am transmitting from the National Weather Service office in Goodland, Kansas. The weather here is sunny. How do you copy?

W1AW: Thanks. The name here is Steve and I am located in Connecticut. The weather here is rainy. You are also a 59. Do you have QSL information?

WX0GLD: Yes, Steve. QSL information may be found in QST magazine. There are many other stations transmitting from National Weather Service locations. Try to work as many as you can. OK?

W1AW: Thanks, Scott, but I do not subscribe to QST magazine.

WX0GLD: OK, Steve, then send a self addressed stamped envelope via WX0GLD. Include a list of all the weather service stations you worked.

W1AW: Fine business, Scott. Will do, and good luck with your special event.

WX0GLD: 73 to you, Rick, and QRZed.

17) Can NWS employees work the radios?

Yes, please yes! NWS employees are encouraged to get on the air during the event. Remember, though, that a control operator must be present if the NWS employee is not a licensed operator.

18) Aren't there a number of nets on Saturdays?

Yes, many amateur radio nets occur on Saturday morning. A net is a regularly scheduled radio meeting between amateur operators. Some nets are large and can handle twenty or more operators. Please be considerate of the nets. If you are requested to move to another frequency to accommodate a net, please do so.

19) How will contacts be logged?

All that is needed this year from NWS sites is an electronic list of the call signs that were worked. It is not necessary to log dates, times, modes, or any other information. Again, all that is needed is a list of contacts, preferably in ASCII format. Any word processor can do this.

Though not necessary, the use of electronic logs is highly encouraged.

20) Where will the logs be sent?

Send the list of call signs worked via email to Matthew.Mehle@noaa.gov.

21) Where can QSL certificates be obtained?

Certificates will be sent from the National Weather Service Office in Goodland, KS. If someone asks for QSL information, have them:

- A) send a request via WX0GLD; or,
- B) go to the internet address; or,
- C) send the request to the NWS office in Goodland, Kansas

The office address is:

SKYWARN Recognition Day
920 Armory Road
Goodland, KS 67735

The ARRL has also committed to publicize the event in QST magazine. This article will also have QSL/certificate information.

Important: Have the person send a self addressed stamped envelope with their request. Also, instruct them to log all NWS contacts on one piece of paper. In other words, we do not need them to send 20 QSL cards if they contacted 20 stations – just a sheet of paper with all the contacts listed there.

22) My station wants to provide individual QSL cards. Can we do this?

Some stations will also offer QSL cards from their location. These stations are listed on the internet site. If your station will offer QSL cards, indicate this on the application form. Also, provide an address where amateurs should send the request. This information will then be posted to the internet. Remember, though, that the event certificate can only be requested from the Goodland, Kansas, location.

23) What do the certificates look like?

The certificates are currently being developed. However, they will be an 8 x 11 inch certificate that contains the call sign of the operator.

24) How will our station know how we did compared to other NWS stations?

Again, this is not a contest event. However, a web page will be created that will contain some results.

25) We would like to publicize the event in the media. Can we do it?

You bet.

26) Is there a national point of contact?

Yes, there are three points-of-contact. Contact either:

Matt Mehle (Matthew.Mehle@noaa.gov)

Dave Floyd (David.L.Floyd@noaa.gov)

Scott Mentzer (Scott.Mentzer@noaa.gov)

27) Is this an annual event?

Yes. This is the eleventh consecutive year that the event has been held.

28) We want to use digital modes and CW at our station. Are there any specific instructions?

Use the appropriate parts of the bands to use CW and digital modes. Append /NWS at the end of your call (e.g., WX0GLD/NWS) when using CW or the digital modes.

29) We want to use the Internet Radio Linking Project (IRLP) at our station. Do you have any information?

Information about IRLP will be sent in separate instructions.

30) We have problems recruiting hams to work the station in the winter near the holidays. Why is this always scheduled in December?

The date is chosen by the NWS and the ARRL. A number of factors are taken into consideration when selecting the date. This includes the possibility of real severe weather impacting the event, the availability of band width due to amateur radio contests, and work load issues during the year.