

More COVID Changes ...

We have more cancellations and format changes to report this month due to the COVID-19 pandemic, along with one new event. The Huntsville Hamfest in Alabama, scheduled for mid-August, has been cancelled for this year; the AMSAT Space Symposium and annual meeting has been converted to a virtual event on the same weekend, October 16-18; and ARISSThe Amateur Radio on the International Space Station program has been continuing to test its "MultiPoint Telepresence" system to allow students in a variety of locations (such as their homes) to still visit with ISS astronauts via amateur radio. In addition, Youth on the Air in the Americas replaced its planned summer camp in late June with a series of online events, including "Virtual YOTA Day" on June 24th and a special event station, W8Y, which was to be operated during the week of June 21-26th from various locations by the youth teams who had been scheduled to attend the camp that week across the Atlantic, IARU Region 1's Youngsters on the Air program inaugurated monthly online meetings to discuss various topics, such as Region 1's Youth Contesting Program.

On the flip side, trying to fill the vacuum created by so many hamfest cancellations, *QSO Today* podcast host Eric Guth, 4Z1UG, has organized a worldwide virtual hamfest for the weekend of August 8th and 9th. The "QSO Today Virtual Ham Expo" will use an online exposition platform to connect attendees with various vendors and to present talks on a variety of ham radio subjects. More information is available at <www.qsotodayhamexpo.com>.

Don't Send Those Buro Cards Just Yet

If you still enjoy exchanging paper QSL cards with DX stations, you should know that getting those cards from here to there may be a problem for the foreseeable future. The U.S. Postal Service says it has temporarily stopped accepting international mail for nearly 100 countries around the world due to impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic. As of June 10th, mail service to 21 countries had been suspended due to "foreign postal operator service suspension" and another 75 countries were on the "do not mail" list due to "unavailability of transportation." The regularly updated list of specific countries, along with procedures for requesting a refund or remailing in the future is at <<http://tinyurl.com/sxvuqwb>>.

In a related story, the ARRL says it was experiencing 1-3 week delays in shipping member orders as of mid-May, due to restrictions on how many people at a time could be present in their warehouse and excessive demands on shipping carriers. Here at *CQ*, we have experienced very slow and sporadic mail delivery. On the bright side, our offices, which have been closed since mid-March under state stay-at-home orders, were scheduled to reopen on June 15th.

"Above Normal" Hurricane Season Predicted

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Climate Prediction Center says we're likely to be in for an "above normal" hurricane season this year, with 13-19 named storms, 6-10 hurricanes and 3-6 major hurricanes of category 3 or higher. A typical season has 12 named storms and 6 hurricanes, of which 3 become major, according to NOAA. The forecast isn't surprising, since there had already been two named storms before the season officially began on June 1st, and the third one, Cristobal, formed on June 2nd. The season runs through November 30th.

Amateur radio operators are preparing as always. According to the *ARRL Letter*, WX4NHC — the ham station at the National Hurricane Center — conducted its annual station test on May 30th and Hurricane Watch Net Manager Bobby Graves, KB5HAV, said "I'm not liking what I'm seeing," noting that the net has activated for nine major land-falling hurricanes in the past five years, four of which were rated at Category 5, the most intense.

Ham Makes Space History

One of the two astronauts launched to the International Space Station on May 30th aboard the SpaceX Dragon capsule is a ham — Bob Behnken is KE5GGX. He and crewmate Doug Hurley were the first astronauts to travel to orbit aboard a commercially built and operated spacecraft, as well as the first to be launched from a U.S. spaceport in over nine years. According to *Newsline*, Behnken and Hurley join the ISS's Expedition 63 crew, which is commanded by another ham, astronaut Chris Cassidy, KF5KDR.

New RF Safety Rules Take Effect; ARRL Seeks Clarification

The FCC's new RF safety rules for amateurs (and others) took effect on June 1st, eliminating some categorical exemptions from making evaluations, and hams now have two years in which to determine whether evaluations will need to be made for any aspects of their stations. The ARRL has filed a petition for clarification with the FCC on two elements of the amended rules, specifically relating to the 2200-meter band and to handheld portable devices (HTs). According to the *ARRL Letter*, the request centers on technical measurement requirements, noting that the standards themselves have not changed, only the circumstances under which amateurs will need to make specific evaluations.

Ham-Owned Company Helps Improve Ventilator Flexibility

We've reported previously on ham involvement in designing a "MacGyver" type ventilator using an Arduino microcontroller and parts from local hardware stores. Now, hams in New England are helping the University of Massachusetts at Amherst improve the flexibility of ventilators already in use by BayState Health. Those ventilators used short control cables and ran on D-cell batteries that needed to be replaced every 48 hours. The hospital wanted longer control cables to allow personnel to safely control the ventilators without needing to wear personal protective equipment, and a wall-power solution to eliminate the need for frequent battery changes.

The university's Electrical and Computer Engineering Department determined that cables as long as 50 feet would work in theory, then fabricated a test cable that worked properly. The university then worked with the control cable manufacturer to design and produce the longer cables.

For the power solution, the department reached out to one of its former professors — and *CQ* author — Robert Glorioso, W1IS, who now runs The Battery Eliminator Store with his son, Scott, K1SRG. Bob and Scott found an off-the-shelf battery eliminator that met the unit's needs and, after successfully testing it on a portable ventilator, filled the hospital's order for 50 of the units. The combination of the longer cable and the ability to run off of wall power makes it safer for the hospital staff to use and control the ventilators.