



Second Century

EmComm: It's In Our Purpose!

Emergency communications — EmComm — is in the spotlight this month in both QST and On the Air magazines as we begin the 2021 hurricane, tornado, and wildfire season. Let's look at why this is important, not just for some hams, but for all hams!

The ARRL Board knows the importance of emergency communications, and is creating a committee focused on its guidance and oversight. EmComm is also a critical element of the spectrum privileges we enjoy. FCC Part 97 provides us with the fundamental purpose of the Amateur Radio Service, and it doesn't mean that amateur radio equals public service! FCC Part 2.1c refers to the term "Service" as "the transmission, emission and/or reception of radio waves for specific telecommunication purposes." The Amateur Radio Service means much more than that. In just five simple principles, the FCC puts forward what it expects of us:

Recognition and enhancement of the value of the amateur service to the public as a voluntary noncommercial communication service, particularly with respect to providing emergency communications.

There are a few noteworthy things to unpack from this principle. The first is that it is our responsibility to make sure that the public at large understands the *value* of amateur radio. This is where our Section Managers and Public Information Coordinators/Officers come in. Social media can also play an important role here. The second point is that amateur radio is voluntary — it is your choice to participate — and it is noncommercial, meaning you're not getting paid, as it is your *avocation*, not your vocation. The third is that among all the ways we participate in demonstrating the value of amateur radio to the public, providing emergency communications is of particular importance! Every year, there are communities that find themselves in an unexpected disaster situation, with a disruption to commercial communications and/or power systems. Well-trained amateur radio operators respond with an emergency communications capability *when all else fails*.

Continuation and extension of the amateur's proven ability to contribute to the advancement of the radio art.

This simple statement reinforces the fact that hams have proven their ability to innovate in the advancement of the state of the art. Today, much of the innovation we see is an expansion into software-defined radio, shack automation, remote access, connectivity embedded into radios and amplifiers, and weak signal modes. Think about how networking technologies like AREDN and Winlink may factor into EmComm in the future.

Encouragement and improvement of the amateur service through rules which provide for advancing skills in both the communication and technical phases of the art.

The FCC believes that, within the rules of Part 97, they have provided adequate support for hams to advance the state of the art. There's also an implication that there may be room to amend the rules to support new initiatives that can drive innovation. A good example is the use of various digital modes in support of EmComm. As we continue to develop new technologies, we can go — and have gone — to the FCC for reconsideration of sections of Part 97 that need to evolve.

Expansion of the existing reservoir within the amateur radio service of trained operators, technicians, and electronics experts.

ARRL is focused on rolling out our Learning Center platform to grow the community of trained EmComm operators. Your involvement in any on-the-air activities that improve your ability to copy signals and make contacts (e.g. nets, contests, POTA, etc.) helps meet this principle.

Continuation and extension of the amateur's unique ability to enhance international goodwill.

From our leadership and involvement in the IARU, to the relationships we enjoy with radio amateurs around the world, to putting boots on the ground in places like Abaco Island, Bahamas after Hurricane Dorian, we play a vital role fostering international goodwill. Radio signals recognize no boundaries and connect us all into one big community.

Taking the time to invest in training for yourself and readiness for your station will prepare you for the potential challenges this summer.

So, get prepared! Get more involved in meeting these five fundamental principles of our hobby, be radio active, be that connector with local hams, and stay safe!

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