

## “Is Ham Radio a Service or a Hobby”

While reading articles on the internet I ran across something I found to be thought provoking and decided to pursue the thought and see where it ended up. What I found was the ARRL’s past President, Jim Haynie, being quoted as saying, “We’re not a hobby. We’re an amateur radio service.” So tonight after I complete the materials about this subject I would like to hear what Amateur radio is to each of you, are we a Service, a hobby, both or more.

I found this to not only be an interesting subject but also very important. Amateur radio is at a pivot point in history where it is critical for us to know just what we are and why: members of a radio service or electronic hobbyists? Personally I like to think that we are both and even more. There is no doubt that our mission statement has changed over the past few years but Part 97 is relatively unchanged in its wording, Part 97.1 Basis and purpose say’s.

*The rules and regulations in this Part are designed to provide an amateur radio service having a fundamental purpose as expressed in the following principles:*

*(a) 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.*

*(c) Encouragement and improvement of the amateur service through rules which provide for advancing skills in both the communications and technical phases of the art.*

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

*Part 97.3 Definitions say's.*

*(a) The definitions of terms used in Part 97 are:*

*(2) Amateur radio services. The amateur service, the amateur-satellite service and the radio amateur civil emergency service.*

*(4) Amateur service. A radio communication service for the purpose of self-training,*

*intercommunication and technical investigations carried out by amateurs, that is, duly authorized persons interested in radio technique solely with a personal aim and without pecuniary interest.*

In today's world of Amateur radio there is handling traffic, ragchewing, checking into nets, chasing DX, CW, building antennas, QRP, experimenting with things like PSK31, Winlink, airmail, APRS, satellite communication, new modes for communications and digital voice transmission, these are but just a few of the fun parts of our amateur radio hobby/service today.

However, we cannot hide from reality. Look at the coming of powerful home computers, high speed electronic connections, world wide communication and information transfer via the Internet, cheap long distance rates via phone cards, hand held Cell phones that can reach parties around the globe, global positioning satellite equipment that tells us at all times where we are and where we are going, and on and on. In my opinion only a crack pot would say that Amateur Radio is the same today as it was twenty years ago, or even five years ago.

We are at a new page in Amateur Radio History. It is not the end of Ham Radio like the predictions that has been made every time in the past when a new electronic communication technology was developed. Also, it is not the dawn of a new age where Amateur Radio will only be some form of charity or community service organization. Nor will Ham Radio be just a fun pastime for the electronically talented or technically curious. So, what then are we to become in this new phase of our history? That depends on us. It is my opinion however, that the challenge has never been greater for Amateur Radio to demonstrate the importance of electronic communication and the use of sound methodology for the transfer of information. The challenge is to serve our communities and demonstrate the need for an amateur radio service whether it is in providing safety through communications at a parade, or helping with numerous communication problems associated with public safety during foul and dangerous weather. The challenge is to provide a committed well trained cadre of volunteer radio operators to provide back up for communications. The best plan will fail unless all involved know their part in

today's world of emergency communications. This is where a training program comes in. Training never stops, it is a continuous cycle that ensures that all team members are able to do their best when called upon.

So where are we now? As I said earlier, in my opinion we are at a pivot point. It's time to discuss what we are and what we can be.

Amateur Radio is a "service" and a "hobby" and much more. We are public servants. We are both student and teacher. We are the first level volunteer communicators of last resort during some emergencies. Whatever we are or whatever we become, I believe it is critically important that we take it seriously. I believe amateur radio operators should stand proudly and let others know what Ham radio is and what it can be. In all this, leadership, teamwork and initiative are key factors to our success!

Training, training, training, that's the buzzword these days, as far as emergency operations and Ham Radio are concerned. Being an experienced

daily Net Control Station, packet operator, DX, CW, etc. operator does not qualify you for emergency operations participation. Being trained in proper procedures, participating in exercises, training net's, practicing and honing the skills needed, learning the policies and proper procedures in use, and then working as a team member does make you a trained amateur radio ARES/RACES volunteer. If you're prepared and ready, you know it. If you don't have the time to participate in drills, events and training, then it's just not that important to you and that's OK too, just stay out of the way and let the people who are trained do their work when the time comes. One of the challenges of emergency management officials and our ARES/RACES leadership has always been the fact that the well-meaning, know it all wanna-be but untrained volunteers create challenges on the front line. There is no time to get people trained or up to speed once the emergency/disaster happens. Like the following quote says, "Experience is the worst teacher; it gives the test before presenting the lesson." - Vernon Sanders Law. Some people think this quote is a joke but it is not. Think about the untrained volunteer who has never had emergency training, maybe only worked a few

public service events where everything is mostly preplanned and known in advance, there is no real pressure, no destruction all around them, everyone is relaxed and in their safe comfort zones. Put that person into a disaster area working with emergency management Officials, the stress levels are going out the roof, destruction is all around them, there is no preplanning for them to follow because everything is changing from one minute to the next and they become a part of the problem. Don't get me wrong here, working Public Service Events is good training to a point but there is a limited learning curve and there is more to emergency communications training than standing on a corner waiting for runners to come by and calling their runner number into a NCS. Not having the proper training and being thrown into a disaster situation to provide emergency communications is much different than working any Public Service event. Today's emergency management officials expect more from their responders and deservedly so, they have had enough of the wanna-be untrained and half trained know it all's.

Differences between disaster communications and Public Service events:

1. Public service events are scheduled - emergencies are not.
2. Public service does not require activation by a served disaster or relief agency.
3. Does not use an "activation system" and related deployment plans.
4. Public service events involve only a single served organization in most cases. Many emergencies involve serving several different agencies all at the same time.
5. Personnel for public service events can be recruited, confirmed, and scheduled in advance.
6. Network designs can be planned and tested in advance.
7. Most logistical problems can be solved before the event.
8. Operator IDs and security checks are not usually required except for large events.
9. Formal messages are seldom needed.
10. No need to interface with long distance traffic nets (NTS).
11. Events occur in "real time", and problems must be solved as they happen.
12. Not every event is predictable.

REMEMBER: Those Amateur radio operators that have trained, have practiced, have honed their knowledge and have improved their skills in emergency communications have truly earned the right to be called emergency communications service providers.