

(Comments From Tom Harris K5WTH STM)

Over the past few weeks I have been hearing conversations and have even see one e-mail about the OO's. So, I thought since we now have so many new Ham's coming on board with us and the comments that are being made by some of our Older Hams and in the light of a recent mailing from Riley Hollingsworth the FCC's chief Enforcement Officer I have prepared some material that I will be presenting this evening to remove any doubts about the OO's.

The Amateur Auxiliary of the FCC

OO Program

The Official Observer program is a part of the Communications Amendments Act, Public Law 97-259 and it authorizes the FCC to formally enlist the use of Amateur radio volunteers to monitor for Part 97 Rules violations. The FCC, pursuant to the Communications Act, states that the Amateur Auxiliary is composed of amateur operators and trained with material from the Commission and the ARRL for the purpose of detecting, on a voluntary and uncompensated basis, improper radio transmissions and issuing Official Observer Advisory Notices to persons who apparently have violated provisions of the Communications Act, Part 97

relating to amateur radio or who have violated any of the rules that govern the amateur radio service.

Since the beginning of the Official Observer program its appointees have assisted thousands of amateurs to maintain their transmitting equipment and operating procedures in compliance with the regulations. The object of the OO program is to notify amateurs by mail of operating and or technical irregularities before they come to the attention of the FCC.

Although the Official Observer program is sponsored by the ARRL, the FCC's Amateur Auxiliary is authorized to write Official Observer Advisory Notices to all licensed Amateur radio operators.

The role of the Amateur Auxiliary is to provide an unbiased forum for technical and operational advice and other assistance to amateurs who are receptive. The task is not to find fault or lay blame! It is to identify cause and effect, many of which are not based upon technical but behavioral or social issues, and to find ways to achieve solutions to promote good amateur operating and engineering practice on our bands.

The mission of an Official Observer is NOT enforcement. Enforcement is a function reserved exclusively by the FCC. Because the boundary between observation and enforcement is not always

obvious, mature judgment is clearly required of Auxiliary members and its leadership.

The Official Observer program is the backbone of the Amateur Auxiliary to the FCC. All Official Observers' must be certified in the Auxiliary by passing a mandatory written examination.

The OO performs his/her function by listening rather than transmitting, keeping an ear out for such things as frequency instability, harmonics, broad signals, distorted audio, over deviation, out-of-band operation, causing interference, improper or no ID and other violations of Part 97. The OO completes his/her task once the notification card is sent unless in hard-core rules violations cases, OO's may refer problems to higher echelons of the Amateur Auxiliary or direct to the FCC, and may be requested to gather evidence such as recordings and signed statements from Amateurs and other documentation for possible FCC enforcement actions.

Some of the requirements an OO must meet is:

1. They must take and pass examination to be certified as a member of the Amateur Auxiliary, and this is an FCC requirement, based on study of the ARRL's *Amateur Auxiliary Training Manual*.

2. They must be an ARRL Full Member and have been a licensee of Technician Class or higher for at least four years.
3. They must report to the OO Coordinator regularly on FSD-23.
4. They maintain regular activity in sending out advisory notices as needed.

A few Q & A

Q. What are the Amateur Auxiliaries objectives?

1. Foster a wider knowledge of and better compliance with the FCC rules;
2. Extend the concepts of self-regulation and self-administration in the Amateur Service;
3. Enhance the opportunity for individual amateurs to contribute to the public welfare; and
4. Enable the Enforcement Bureau of FCC to efficiently and effectively utilize its limited manpower and resources.

Q. I got an OO card in the mail! What do I do now?

A. First, don't worry: *This is not a citation!* The OO post card is simply a friendly note to alert you to possible equipment factors or operating practices that might have contributed to an apparent departure from

a rule or the good amateur practice standard. Remember, OO's are friendly helper-advisors, not the "radio police"! Their mission is to assist those who are receptive to being assisted.

Q. Is a record of the notice kept anywhere?

A. Yes. A record of the notice is kept at ARRL Headquarters for a period of one year, after which it is destroyed. Records are kept so that if a case evolves into a serious, hard-core compliance issue, it may be used by the FCC as evidence, showing that voluntary measures of achieving resolution were ineffective. The information is also used to guide OO's in special monitoring efforts. Otherwise, the information is kept strictly confidential and is never released outside of the Auxiliary.

Q. Hey, I received a Good Operator Report. What's that for?

A. Congratulations! To emphasize the positive nature of the program, "Good Operator Reports" are sent to operators whose radio signals and/or operating practices are consistent with the highest standards and are a model for others to follow. Every amateur should strive to pattern their operating and signals after your example!

Q. How can I apply to be an OO?

A. It's not a job for everybody: An OO will observe some operating that will fill him with a sense of frustration. There's also no room in the program for "band cops." OO's gain their rewards when they are able to call an undesirable situation to the attention of someone who honestly was not aware of it, and who is genuinely appreciative of the assistance.

The Arkansas Section is looking for a few more folks who would like to become an Official Observer. If you believe you can pass the written test, have been licensed for at least four years, are a full Member of the ARRL and you have the right attitude contact our Section Manager, David Norris, K5UZ.