

Rockford Amateur Radio Association

Repeater Conduct

Why do we need rules at all for repeater conduct or etiquette? We tend to assume that everyone knows the generally accepted rules. But, that could be careless of us and unfair to those who want or need to have a clearer definition of our expectations and requirements. It can also create discord when repeater users offend others by unknowingly breaking some unwritten rule. Activities that may be an irritation or even a flagrant violation to one person might not be an issue at all to another. It's probably best for us to be clear about the rules we really think are important.

We understand that everyone slips once in a very great while, no matter how hard they try. But, we expect all users of the Rockford Amateur Radio Association's repeaters to do their very best to follow these few simple and obvious rules of repeater conduct.

1. Always identify according to the regulations.

Correct operating procedure is a distinct characteristic of Amateur Radio. It's important that you convey to the public and to new hams the image that Amateur Radio operators really know what they are doing. A friendly style is great, but take pains to operate professionally. Don't become sloppy. Amateur Radio regulations are largely self-enforced and we all need to work together towards these goals.

2. Avoid lengthy QSOs.

Please limit QSOs to 20 or 30 minutes. Then take a good long break or move to another frequency. Other hams probably want to use the repeater but might not be interested in the subject your group is discussing. None of us should monopolize the repeater, even unintentionally.

It's not enough to pause now and then and invite others to join in. They may just not be interested in the topic. Be polite, and don't be a "repeater hog."

3. Do not engage in excessive political soap boxing.

Soap boxing, which goes hand-in-hand with overly long QSOs, is when people carry on a conversation on the repeater that is a thinly disguised broadcast. The subject is generally to "put down" an institution, group, or an individual for as wide as possible an audience. This is very objectionable to other repeater users and listeners. Using the club's repeaters as a platform for soap boxing is unacceptable.

Conversations on the repeaters should be friendly ones. Do not make them negative commentaries on institutions, groups, or people. Avoid lengthy discussions on inappropriate subjects such as politics. Don't use the repeaters to "put people down." Amateur Radio is not a broadcast medium – 97.113(5)(b).

Never allow Amateur Radio to become the audio version of *The Jerry Springer Show*.

--Riley Hollingsworth

Are we talking about censorship? No, not exactly. A person may have the right to stand on the street and say bad things about someone. They don't have the same right when they are a guest in that person's house. When using the RARA repeaters, you are a guest operator of our station. No one has any right to use the club's repeaters in ways that the club feels are objectionable.

4. Do not routinely circumvent the timeout timer.

The repeater's timeout timer serves two purposes. The first purpose is to satisfy regulation 97.213(b) requiring us to limit repeater transmissions to a maximum of three minutes under automatic control.

Like many repeater owners, we also use the timeout timer as a way to encourage users to limit the length of individual transmissions. This gives everyone a chance to speak. Under normal conditions, it is rude to get around the timeout timer by momentarily dropping carrier to reset the timer.

We have actually heard repeater QSOs in which the *average* individual transmission was six to seven minutes. Even with only two stations talking, that would require each station to identify both at the beginning and the end of every transmission just to meet the 10-minute rule!

Resetting the timeout timer should only be done as absolutely required and *infrequently*. Learn to speak concisely and limit the length of your individual transmissions.

5. No CB Lingo, please.

Amateur Radio operators find the sound of CB lingo worse than fingernails on a blackboard. The main thing to remember is to just talk *normal*. Talk just like you would to someone in person. There's nothing different about talking over the radio. Using slang jargon just labels a person as an ex-CBer. Just talk *normal*.

6. Our repeaters are "G-Rated" 24 hours a day.

You never know who may be listening. Even late at night, there are generally people listening to the repeater, including non-hams. This is important to understand for several reasons.

Our repeaters serve many purposes. One of the most important is the exposure it gives the hobby to the community. Any scanner can be used to listen to our repeaters. That's good – It's actually the most visible aspect of our club. It's one of our most effective forms of publicity.

We want non-hams to know that Amateur Radio is an interesting hobby and a good group of people to get to know - something clean and educational - something they would want their kids to get involved in. Kids may or may not listen late at night, but their parents do.

Think about CB. The government tolerates the language on CB partly because they only use a few kilohertz of spectrum. It's not a huge waste. Amateur Radio, on the other hand, uses a lot of valuable spectrum. There needs to be a noticeable difference between Amateur Radio and CB. Don't let our activities on the air become a weapon in the hands of people who want to discredit us. Let's all do our part to give Amateur Radio a positive image.

We want any ham that listens to us to think of us as good operators, not idiots. Any time we talk on the repeater, we are ambassadors for the hobby. Have you ever noticed how you like to listen to some repeaters, but sometimes you find a repeater that makes you roll your eyes and twist the knob? We lose good people because of what they hear on our repeaters.

Our rule is simple: **absolutely no obscene, indecent or profane language at any time.**

Operate as if the whole world is listening. *It is!*
--Riley Hollingsworth

What gives RARA the right to tell someone how to operate?

All repeaters have rules. These rules often go beyond Part 97. And, users who refuse to comply with the repeater's rules can be told to stop using the repeaters. This is entirely at the judgement of the repeater trustees.

Rule 97.205(e) says, "...Limiting the use of a repeater to only certain user stations is permissible." There are no qualifications – ifs, ands, or buts – to this rule. This isn't just the right to close a repeater. In fact, the ARRL says, "...a repeater does not have to be listed as being "closed" in *The ARRL Repeater Directory* in order to have a limited access." (Source: *The ARRL's FCC Rule Book*) The terms "open" and "closed" don't appear in the regulations at all! Listing a repeater as "open" means you don't have to be a member in order to use it. But, you still must follow the rules of the repeater.

The FCC supports a trustee's right to control the use of their repeaters. The letter reproduced below is an example. On Dec. 13, 2001, FCC Special Counsel for Amateur Radio Enforcement Riley Hollingsworth wrote to a Mr. Banks because he had not stopped using a repeater when asked. (Reading between the lines it seems that Mr. Banks must have argued that the repeater was "open".) Mr. Hollingsworth explained that a repeater doesn't need to be "closed" for a trustee to require compliance among the users. Banks had to comply or expect FCC enforcement action. Please take time read this letter. Mr. Hollingsworth can be reached at 717-338-2502 if you wish to discuss this.

RE: Amateur Radio License KB4AN: Warning Notice

Dear Mr. Banks:

On November 14, 2001 the St. Lucie Repeater Association Trustee requested that you refrain from using their AF4CN repeater system. The request was made as a result of your failing to follow Commission rules and operational rules set forth by the licensee/control operators of the repeater. Information indicates that you have not adhered to the request.

The Commission requires that repeaters be under the supervision of a control operator and holds such control operators and licensees responsible for the proper operation of the repeater system. Control operators may take whatever steps are appropriate to ensure compliance with the repeater rules, including converting the repeater to a closed repeater or taking it off the air entirely. We do not require them to convert the repeater to a closed repeater in order to ensure compliance among the users.

Please be advised that we expect you to abide by the request to stay off the AF4CN system and your failure to do so after receipt of this letter will jeopardize your Amateur license. If you use the repeater again we will initiate enforcement action against your license, which may include revocation, forfeiture or a modification proceeding to restrict the frequencies on which you may operate KB4AN.

Section 308(b) of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended, 47 U.S.C. Section 308(b), gives the Commission the authority to obtain information from licensees about the operation of their stations. Pursuant to that section, you are requested to respond to this letter within 20 days stating what action you have taken to comply with the November 14, 2001 request by the AF4CN repeater trustee.

We also note that your address in our database shows 4356 Dorothea Drive in Lake Worth. Please take immediate steps to correct it.

Here is our policy: the Rockford Amateur Radio Association's repeaters are open for all to use, ***provided you follow the club's rules in using them.***

Nothing could be fairer. The ARRL says it clearest of all.

“A repeater is *not* a public utility - you don't have a “right” to use it! When you are using someone else's repeater you are, in effect, a visitor in the owner's station. So, you should conduct yourself accordingly. If you use that station in a manner that the owner finds objectionable, that person has every right to revoke your privilege of using it!” (Source: *The ARRL's FCC Rule Book*)

To use our repeaters you must follow our rules. There are repeaters with more lenient rules than ours are and some which are much more restrictive. Beyond the FCC minimum requirements, it's up to each repeater owner to set their own operating rules. A repeater user needs to try to fit in. If the rules for RARA's repeaters are uncomfortable for you and do not suit your personal needs or style we encourage you to try other repeaters or even try talking on simplex.

We wish for everyone willing to abide by these simple rules to freely use our repeaters. We welcome you and hope you have many enjoyable QSOs on the repeaters of the Rockford Amateur Radio Association. 73!

Board of Directors
Rockford Amateur Radio Assn. Inc.
October 10, 2002 / Amended 2003