

The Amateur Auxiliary of the FCC

Hams Helping Hams
An Official Observer Tradition for More Than 50 Years



Q. What is the Amateur Auxiliary?

A. The Amateur Auxiliary is composed of approximately 700 ARRL volunteer-appointees, known as "Official Observers" or "OOs," across the country who monitor the bands and notify amateurs of technical and operating discrepancies as a service to their fellow hams. OOs are helper-advisors, not "band cops." In cases involving serious rule violations such as malicious interference, however, they are trained and certified to gather and forward evidence that can be used by the FCC in enforcement actions.

The program is based on a formal agreement between the FCC and the ARRL.

Q. What are its objectives?

A. The general objectives of the program are to:

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. So, the OO is there to help me?

A. Yes! 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.

Q. Are OOs allowed to enforce the rules?

A. No! *The mission 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 Auxiliary, to be viable and effective, must avoid the appearance of enforcement. It must also avoid the appearance of having a vested interest in any specific type of amateur operations or of being sympathetic to amateur groups which advocate specific activities or causes. OOs are not to be involved in cases where they have a personal interest. They must be totally objective.

Q. Do OOs deal with RFI problems?

A. No. The Amateur Auxiliary is designed to deal ONLY with amateur-to-amateur interference and improper on-air operation by amateurs. RFI complaints are not within the scope of the program.

Q. Do OOs deal with non-amateur intruders or "bootleggers"?

A. No and yes! Reports of non-amateur HF intruders (a foreign broadcast station, for example) are sent to ARRL HQ for referral to the ARRL Monitoring System, a separate program. Cases involving "bootleggers" on repeaters or elsewhere are within the scope of the Auxiliary program.

Q. How are repeater "jammers" handled?

A. A component of the Amateur Auxiliary program, Local Interference Committees (LIC) are commissioned by the ARRL Section Manager with an OO as chairman to track down and resolve repeater jamming problems. If the problem persists, the LIC may develop the package of evidence that the FCC can use to base an enforcement action. LIC members are experts in direction-finding techniques, use good judgment in the art of negotiation to bring about resolutions and often have a ham-attorney as a member.

Q. How are repeater-to-repeater interference and coordination disputes settled?

A. They are usually settled locally or regionally, by the parties to the dispute and the affected user community. Such matters, however, may come to the attention of the Amateur Auxiliary program when harmful interference is caused by a non-coordinated repeater to a coordinated repeater. The non-coordinated repeater bears the primary responsibility of cleaning up the interference, under the FCC Rules.

Q. Isn't the OO doing work that should more properly be done by the FCC?

A. Amateur Radio monitoring and enforcement are low priorities at the FCC. Time and time again, the FCC has indicated that we're largely on our own in keeping our operating standards and spectrum in shape. The Amateur Auxiliary program and its OOs are the League's answer to this challenge.

Q. What can be done about interference on the HF bands?

A. Interference is a fact of life on today's crowded HF bands and most of it is of the "no-fault" kind that's better resolved by being flexible than by confrontation. Interference in and of itself is not illegal. Only malicious interference is actionable under the rules. It exists in its clearest form when the following conditions are met:

- 1) Two or more stations are in communication on a frequency.
- 2) Another station begins transmitting on the same or an adjacent frequency.
- 3) The original stations, acknowledging on-the-air that they cannot copy one another through the interfering station's transmissions, and decide to move to another frequency.
- 4) When they move, the interfering station *follows* and commences interfering transmissions again.

Additionally, it must involve an ongoing campaign on a regular, repeated basis: No one can reasonably expect the FCC and/or the Amateur Auxiliary to act on a one-time, isolated event.

Q. What can be done about hams that make rude remarks, racial slurs, or transmit obscene or indecent words?

A. Much of what is heard is inappropriate and violates standards of polite society, but it is not illegal. Only obscene or indecent transmissions are illegal. See the League's *FCC Rule Book* for a discussion of how the FCC defines the standards for obscenity and indecency. Serious cases can be referred to the Amateur Auxiliary for handling.

Language that's inappropriate, but not illegal, or isn't so serious that we can reasonably expect the FCC to devote resources to its correction, must be addressed by the amateur community itself. We must not let the bad behavior drive out the good: Each of us who cares about Amateur Radio must maintain the highest possible standards when operating, even in the face of provocation. We must let other amateurs know, as politely as possible, that we expect them to observe the same standards.

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, OOs are friendly helper-advisors, not the "radio police"! Their mission is to assist those who are receptive to being assisted.

OFFICIAL OBSERVER ADVISORY NOTICE

Radio: _____, your call was heard _____ calling _____ at _____ UTC.
working

Date: _____ 19 ____ Frequency _____ kHz. Mode _____. Your RST _____.

The following is noted in the interest of maintaining Amateur Radio's reputation for good operating/technical practices: 1 FREQUENCY INSTABILITY 2 CHIRP 3 SPURIOUS 4 HARMONIC 5 HUM
6 KEY CLICKS 7 BROAD SIGNAL 8 DISTORTED AUDIO 9 OVER DEVIATION 10 OUT OF BAND
11 IMPROPER ID 12 LANGUAGE 13 CAUSING INTERFERENCE 15 CARRIER 20 OTHER

Remarks: _____

Please refer to FCC Regulation _____. Please take a few minutes to determine what equipment factors or operating practices might have contributed to this apparent departure from the rule or the good amateur practice standard. The intent of this notice is to alert you to the above noted operating condition. **NO REPLY IS NECESSARY.** The undersigned ARRL Official Observer has fulfilled this helping role by simply alerting you, and is not required to reply to any correspondence. Thank you for your attention and any cooperative efforts to enhance the high standards of the Amateur Radio Service which we all share with pride.

FSD-213(885) Signature _____ Call _____

Q. Do I have to reply to the notice?

A. *No reply is necessary!* You may want to take a few minutes to determine what caused the apparent problem, and then take steps to fix it. Most likely, you're proud of your license and the work you've put into getting it--you want to have the same pride in the quality of your signal and operating practices. Your corrective actions might even head off an FCC "pink slip" down the road.

Q. The card seemed a little nit-picky to me. Do OOs send cards for discrepancies that lie in the gray area between black and white rules violations?

A. OOs are advised to avoid hair-splitting and to deal only with black-and-white rule discrepancies only. They should avoid the "gray areas" of the rules. OOs should not be nit-picky either. For example, an OO should not send a notice to someone who forgot to identify his station for ten minutes and eight seconds!

If you feel that the OO sent you a notice that violates the principles of the program, send a copy to your Section Manager (if known) or to Headquarters for evaluation and possible action. Quality control is critically important in a program as sensitive as this one!

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 OOs 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!

Good Operator Report

Radio: _____, your call was heard ^{calling} _{working} _____ at _____ UTC.

Date: _____ 199 ____ Frequency _____ kHz. Mode _____. Your RST _____.

We thought you would like to know . . .

That this Official Observer has noted your EXCELLENT radio signal quality/operating procedure as a fine example for all radio amateurs.

Remarks: _____

This observation by the undersigned ARRL Official Observer is a function of the Amateur Auxiliary to the FCC's Compliance and Information Bureau. This Observer thanks you for your excellent example of good amateur practice for others in the Amateur Radio Service. Keep up the good work.

FSD-15(3/95) Signature _____ Call _____

Training and Certification

Q. Are OOs trained and/or certified to perform their functions?

A. Yes! All OOs must pass a comprehensive examination based on a set of study materials, before they can be certified as members of the Amateur Auxiliary. These materials include an extensive training manual, *The FCC Rule Book*, and the *ARRL Handbook*. Many don't pass.

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." OOs gain their rewards when they're able to call an undesirable situation to the attention of someone who honestly wasn't aware of it, and who is genuinely appreciative of the assistance.