

## THE AMERICAN RADIO RELAY LEAGUE INC



The American Radio Relay League Inc is a noncommercial association of radio amateurs, organized for the promotion of interest in Amateur Radio communication and experimentation, for the establishment of networks to provide communication in the event of disasters or other emergencies, for the advancement of the radio art and of the public welfare, for the representation of the radio amateur in legislative matters, and for the maintenance of fraternalism and a high standard of conduct.

ARRL is an incorporated association without capital stock chartered under the laws of the State of Connecticut, and is an exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986. Its affairs are governed by a Board of Directors, whose voting members are elected every three years by the general membership. The officers are elected or appointed by the directors. The League is noncommercial, and no one who could gain financially from the shaping of its affairs is eligible for membership on its Board.

"Of, by, and for the radio amateur," the ARRL numbers within its ranks the vast majority of active amateurs in the nation and has a proud history of achievement as the standard-bearer in amateur affairs.

A *bona fide* interest in Amateur Radio is the only essential qualification of membership; an Amateur Radio license is not a prerequisite, although full voting membership is granted only to licensed amateurs in the US.

Membership inquiries and general correspondence should be addressed to the administrative headquarters; see pages 14 and 15 for detailed contact information.

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## "IT SEEMS TO US..."

### Restructuring II

At its mid-January meeting the ARRL Board of Directors agreed on a proposal for additional restructuring of amateur licensing in the United States. This resumes a process that was begun by the FCC in 1998 but only partly completed by the Commission's decision, effective on April 15, 2000, to offer only three classes of amateur license and to reduce the maximum Morse code examination requirement to 5 words per minute.

Long before the FCC opened its 1998 proceeding, known as WT Docket 98-143, it was clear that the Novice license was no longer functioning as the normal entry point into Amateur Radio. That role had been supplanted in 1991, when Morse code was removed from the qualifications for a Technician license. Under the international Radio Regulations, a license for operation below 30 MHz could only be granted to an applicant who had demonstrated Morse code ability. As a result, new Technicians are restricted to VHF and higher bands. The Technician license offers full privileges above 50 MHz, so the written examination must cover a broad range of material—much of which is irrelevant to a beginner.

Typically, new Technicians obtain an FM transceiver for two meters (and perhaps one or two other bands) and listen to their local repeaters until they build up enough courage to hit the push-to-talk switch. Depending on the local situation, this may—or may not—be very rewarding. Hundreds of local clubs and informal groups throughout the country do a great job of welcoming newcomers, helping them discover how to enjoy Amateur Radio and improve their skills. New hams often are eager to volunteer for public service opportunities, which can lead to involvement in other local activities. Of course, if they're fortunate enough to have friends or family members who are hams the process is a whole lot less intimidating.

But the story doesn't always have a happy ending. At least one-fourth of new Technicians *never* get on the air. Of those who do, many don't feel welcome or don't find anything to hold their interest and quickly join the inactive ranks without considering upgrading. Putting more emphasis on mentoring can help, and the ARRL Board is setting out to do that. But new amateurs also should have more opportunities to connect to the wider world of Amateur Radio outside their local area, as many of us did as Novices.

The Board's answer is a new entry-level amateur license with enough privileges to be interesting, without requiring a more difficult exam or reducing the motivation to upgrade. As a result of WRC-03, amateur licenses without a Morse requirement now can include HF privileges. At the same time, it is counterproductive at the entry level to include privileges that are inappropriate or unattractive; this needlessly expands the exam syllabus, shifting the focus away from things a newcomer should know. When you're just getting started in Amateur Radio you don't need to run 1500 watts, be able to operate in the microwave bands or control

satellites—all things that Technicians can do.

At the other end of the licensing continuum, the requirements for the present Amateur Extra license seem to be serving their purpose and the Board found no compelling reason to change them. This may disappoint those who regard the Morse code as obsolete. However, it reflects a rather widely held belief that in view of CW's continuing popularity, the most accomplished radio amateurs should possess at least basic Morse capability in their portfolio of operating skills.

If there are to be three classes of amateur license, one at the entry level and one at the Amateur Extra level, it logically follows that the existing classes of license must be mapped into the new structure. The FCC chose not to do that in Docket 98-143, leaving "legacy" license classes in place indefinitely—presumably, until the last license-holder passes away 70 or 80 years from now. This unnecessarily complicates the FCC regulations and serves no useful purpose for the future.

The Board proposes converting existing Novices—the smallest and least active group of amateurs—into the new entry-level license, which is being called "Novice" until someone comes up with a better name that can fit into the FCC's computer program. This is a change from the ARRL's position on Docket 98-143, when the Board proposed merging the Novice license into General.

When it was available, the Advanced license had a 13-WPM Morse requirement and a written exam on par with the Extra; since the privileges one gains on going from Advanced to Extra are mostly in the CW bands, it makes little sense to withhold them from Advanced licensees when the Morse exam for the Extra is now 5 WPM. So the Board concluded, as it did five years ago, that the Advanced should be merged into Extra.

The middle step is the General license, into which the present Technician and Tech Plus licenses would be merged. The short-term impact is that no one loses any privileges, while Technician and Tech Plus licensees would gain new privileges. In the longer term, Amateur Radio will gain a straightforward three-step licensing structure with a close match between requirements and desired privileges while retaining incentives to improve one's skills. More details, including how the Board's proposals mesh with the earlier ARRL petition to make better use of the existing Novice bands, RM-10413, are in the article on pages 42-45.

Any licensing proposal is bound to be controversial. Plenty of controversy was stirred up by more than a dozen petitions filed with the FCC by groups and individuals after WRC-03. Responding to membership input requested after last July's Board meeting, the ARRL Board correctly saw the issue of licensing requirements as involving more than just the Morse code. Using where the FCC left off in Docket 98-143 as the starting point for a more holistic approach, the Board has developed a solid base for a healthy Amateur Radio Service for the next decade and beyond.

—David Sumner, K1ZZ

