

Optional ARRL Contest Signal Reports

The ARRL administers sixteen Amateur Radio contests. These on-the-air activities make important contributions to keeping our bands active, our equipment up to date, and our operating skills honed. With two exceptions, this proposal recommends that signal reports be made optional for contests that are administered by the ARRL.

Keep the Signal Reports

Those two exceptions are **Straight Key Night** and the **EME Contest**. In Straight Key Night, RST, transformed to "SKN" is at the heart of the event. Straight Key Night is all about nostalgia. Fifty years from now, some of our great-great grandchildren will be able to take a look at that crusty RST signal-reporting system, wondering how it actually worked, complete with T-1, which reads: "Sixty-cycle ac or less, very rough and broad." Its wording is so obsolete that it hasn't been changed to read "60 hertz." Those future hams can have fun on Straight Key Night trying to apply RST to the signals they are receiving. Will there be any noisy AC-sourced homebrew power supplies kicking around then? Will there be any vacuum-tube transmitters or power amplifiers left in the latter half of the 21st century? Maybe not, but the quaint RST system as well as their classic straight keys will give them a flavor of old-time radio.

EME Contest participants are usually very savvy about electronics. Genuine feedback about signals can be quite helpful to operators during the event. Stereotyped RST 599 or 5NN reports are not prevalent in the EME Contest. The required mutually-understood signal report formats for EME and other extremely weak-signal operations are typically more exact and technical than the signal report formats that are used for ordinary terrestrial operations.

Therefore, this proposal recommends that the signal report requirements for Straight Key Night and the EME Contest remain unchanged.

Allow Optional Signal Reports in Any Format

There are four ARRL-administered contests whose rules make no mention of signal reports. Those are **Field Day**, **Sweepstakes**, **Rookie Roundup**, and **August UHF** contests. This proposal recommends that an exchange of signal reports be made optional for Field Day, Sweepstakes, Rookie Roundup and August UHF contests so that operators who like to use signal reports in contests will be free to do so, using any format that they prefer.

Retain Optional Signal Reports in Any Format

There are four ARRL-administered contests whose rules mention that a signal report exchange is optional, but with their formats unspecified. Those contests are **January VHF**, **June VHF**, **10 GHz & Up** and **September VHF**. To my knowledge, those optional signal reports have generated no controversy. This proposal recommends that the rules for those four contests remain unchanged.

Optional ARRL Contest Signal Reports

Make Signal Reports in Any Format Optional

Besides the EME Contest, there are four ARRL-administered contests that require signal reports, but with the signal-report format unspecified. Those are **RTTY Roundup**, **ARRL DX**, **IARU HF Championship** and the **160 meter** contest. By making signal reports optional for those events, operators who want to take the time to send signal reports in formats of their choosing will be free to do so. Contesters who do not want to send any style of signal reports will not be obliged to do so in order to participate.

Make Signal Reports Optional in Any Format

There are two ARRL-administered contests that require RS(T) signal reports in their exchanges. Those are the **School Club Roundup** and the **10 meter** events. Both of those contests encourage participation by beginning contesters, and the prevalence of stereotyped reports like 599 or 5NN or 59 in those events communicates to those newbies that sending fictitious signal reports constitutes good Amateur Radio practice. The solution, again, is to transform those contests so that exchange of signal reports is optional and any signal-report format can be used. Operators who prefer to make no attempt to send actual signal reports will probably just skip them.

Here is a summary of this proposal for ARRL-administered operating events:

Contest	Current Rule	Proposed Rule
Straight Key Night	RST exchange is transformed to SKN.	Keep the same rule.
RTTY Roundup	Required signal report format is open.	Exchange of signal report is optional.
School Club Roundup	RS(T) is required.	Exchange of signal report is optional.
January VHF	Exchange of signal report is optional.	Keep the same rule.
ARRL DX	Required signal report format is open.	Exchange of signal report is optional.
Rookie Roundup	No signal report exchange is mentioned.	Exchange of signal report is optional.
June VHF	Exchange of signal report is optional.	Keep the same rule.
Field Day	No signal report exchange is mentioned.	Exchange of signal report is optional.
IARU HF Championship	Required signal report format is open.	Exchange of signal report is optional.
August UHF	No signal report exchange is mentioned.	Exchange of signal report is optional.
10 GHz & Up	Exchange of signal report is optional.	Keep the same rule.
September VHF	Exchange of signal report is optional.	Keep the same rule.
EME Contest	Send signal report in any mutually understood format.	Keep the same rule.
Sweepstakes	No signal report exchange is mentioned.	Exchange of signal report is optional.
160 meter	Required signal report format is open.	Exchange of signal report is optional.
10 meter	RS(T) is required.	Exchange of signal report is optional.

This transition should be painless, but it will boost the stature of ARRL contesting, since the use of stereotyped signal reports will no longer be condoned in the operating events that the ARRL administers.