



FCC Remarks on RACES and Public Service Communications May 2009

Excerpt from the ARRL article "FCC's Bill Cross: 'Behave Yourselves!'"

<http://www.arrl.org/news/stories/2009/05/28/10841/?nc=1>



The FCC's Special Counsel for Amateur Enforcement Laura Smith and FCC Analyst Bill Cross, W3TN, spoke at the FCC Forum at the Dayton Hamvention on Saturday, May 16

RACES

Cross said that he has been getting questions concerning [RACES](#), asking what plans the FCC has to rejuvenate the organization. "The questions have been from a couple of [FEMA](#) guys who also happen to be hams," he said. "Now, in RACES, stations are certified by a civil defense organization and persons who hold an FCC-issued Amateur Radio operators license are certified by that civil defense organization as enrolled in it. I know that the term 'civil defense organization' is way out-of-date -- emergency management agencies is probably a more current term. But the terminology used in the rules reflects that RACES was created in the Cold War era when there was a concern that everyone would be ordered off the air."

Cross pointed out that RACES "seems to be used for local, state and regional events and it is administered by FEMA. The rules require that communications transmitted in RACES be approved by the organization that certified people and that they're enrolled with. Fundamentally, RACES is there to serve whatever purpose that the emergency management agency has for it. Because the emergency management agency decides whether it has a use for a RACES group, the rejuvenation, if it is even necessary, will have to come from the local or state organizations. They will have to get people interested in joining their groups if they have a use for them. Some of the people I have talked to in different government agencies wonder why we still have this service, given the way that emergency communications are run and managed today."

Public Service Communications

The last topic Cross address concerned public service communications. "There's no rule about public service communications as such in Part 97, because most of the messages you transmit that you think of as public service communications are allowed by [Section 97.111](#). Paragraph (a) authorizes an amateur station to transmit two-way communications including, among other things, exchanging messages with other stations in the Amateur Service and communications necessary to meet essential communications needs and to facilitate relief actions." Cross noted that most of these transmissions -- the essential communications needs and facilitating relief actions -- are two-way exchanges with messages with other amateur stations. "The rule also authorizes you to transmit one-way communications, such as transmissions necessary to make adjustments to the station -- these are your tests, your tones, tossing the carrier to see what the SWR is, that sort of thing -- and brief transmissions necessary to establish two-way communications with other stations."

Cross said that the rules cover everything we do as Amateur Radio operators: "Ragchewing, DX, contests, DXpeditions, county hunting, tuning up, everything. Ninety-nine percent of our communications fall under the rules that are there."

Emergency communications, by their nature, involve an element of immediacy, immediate safety of property and life. "Reporting where damage is, what happened after a tornado goes through or where power lines are down, is certainly public service communications and it's allowed under 97.111, but it may not involve an immediate safety of life and property," Cross explained. "A bridge washed out, for example, may need a more immediate response than downed trees, and reporting that is already allowed as just two-way communications between stations. A car floating, a car with occupants floating down a river is clearly an emergency situation. In cases like that, the rules already provide that at all times and on all frequencies, each control operator must give priority to stations providing emergency communications. I have never heard of a case where a ham station has come on a repeater or a frequency and said, 'I have an emergency message,' and someone said, 'Wait your turn.' That's not your style."