



SQUELCH TALES



Newsletter from the Merrymeeting Amateur Radio Assoc. for January 2000

AMATEUR RESTRUCTURING is here: Three License Classes, One Code Speed

NEWINGTON, CT, Dec 30, 1999--Amateur Radio will get a new look in the new millennium. The FCC today issued its long-awaited Report and Order in the 1998 Biennial Regulatory Review of Part 97--more commonly known as "license restructuring." The bottom line is that starting April 15, 2000, there will be three license classes--Technician, General, and Amateur Extra--and a single Morse code requirement--5 WPM.

"We believe that an individual's ability to demonstrate increased Morse code proficiency is not necessarily indicative of that individual's ability to contribute to the advancement of the radio art," the FCC said.

Besides drastically streamlining the Amateur Radio licensing process, the FCC said its actions would "eliminate unnecessary requirements that may discourage or limit individuals from becoming trained operators, technicians, and electronic experts."

Although no new Novice and Advanced licenses will be issued after the effective date of the Report and Order, the FCC does not plan to automatically upgrade any existing license privileges. The ARRL had proposed a one-time across-the-board upgrading of current Novice and Tech Plus licensees to General class, but the FCC declined to adopt the idea. This means that current licensees will retain their current operating privileges, including access to various modes and sub-bands, and will be able to renew their licenses indefinitely.

Starting April 15, 2000, individuals who qualified for the Technician class license prior to March 21, 1987, will be able to upgrade to General class by providing documentary proof to a Volunteer Examiner Coordinator, paying an application fee, and completing FCC Form 605.

The FCC's decision not to automatically upgrade Novice and Tech Plus licensees means the current Novice/Tech Plus HF sub-bands will remain and not be "refarmed" to higher class licensees as the ARRL had proposed. The FCC said it did not refarm these sub-bands because there was "no consensus" within the amateur community as to what to do with them.

As it had proposed earlier, the FCC decided to lump Technician and Tech Plus licensees into a single licensee database, all designated as "Technician" 5 WPM Morse code examination will continue to have the current Tech Plus HF privileges. "If documentation is needed to verify whether a licensee has passed a telegraphy examination, we may request the documentation from that licensee or the VECs," the FCC said.

In addition to reducing the number of license classes from six to three and eliminating the 20 and 13 WPM code tests, the FCC also will reduce the number of written examination elements from five to three, authorize Advanced Class hams to prepare and administer General class examinations, and eliminate Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES) station licenses. RACES will remain, however. "After review of the record, we conclude that we should eliminate RACES station licenses because RACES station licenses are unnecessary for amateur stations and amateur service licenses to provide emergency communications," the FCC said.

Under the new licensing scheme, there will be four examination elements. Element 1 will be the 5 WPM Morse code exam. Element 2 will be a 35-question written test to obtain a Technician license; Element 3 will be a 35-question Written test to obtain a General license, and Element 4 will be a 50-question written test for the Amateur Extra license. The FCC has left it in the hands of the National Conference of VECs Question Pool Committee to determine the specific mix and makeup of written examination questions. Current Amateur Radio study materials remain valid at least until the new rules become effective in April.

The FCC's new licensing plan means someone will be able to become a ham by passing a single 35-question written examination. The plan also simplifies and shortens the upgrade path from the ground floor through Amateur Extra--especially since amateurs will only have to pass one Morse code test.

Elimination of the 13 and 20-WPM Morse requirements also means an end to physician certification waivers for applicants claiming an inability to pass the Morse code examination due to physical handicap.

The effective date provides a window of upgrade opportunity for current Advanced licensees. Between now and April 15, current Advanced holders may take the existing Element 4B, a 40-question test, giving them credit for having passed the current Extra written examination. Likewise, holders of a Certificate of Successful Completion of Examination (CSCE) for Elements 3B or 4B dated on or after April 17, 1999, will be able to qualify for General or Amateur Extra respectively when the new rules go into effect on April 15, 2000.

The FCC disagreed with the League's suggestion that it undertake a restructuring of operating privileges along with licensing restructuring. "We believe that in light of ongoing discussions concerning implementation of new and more modern communications technologies within the amateur service community, we should accord the amateur service community an opportunity to complete such discussions and possibly reach a consensus regarding implementation of new technologies before we undertake a comprehensive restructuring of the amateur service operating privileges and frequencies," the FCC said in its Report and Order.

In its amendments to Part 97, the FCC's Report and Order refers to a "Club Station Call Sign Administrator," something that does not exist under the current rules and which was not explained in the R&O itself. An FCC spokesperson said the Commission plans to issue a Public Notice soon to explain the program and to solicit qualified entities to serve as call sign administrators for club station applications.

A copy of the entire Report and Order (FCC 99-412) is available at:

<http://www.arrl.org/announce/regulatory/wt98-143ro.pdf> or at

http://www.fcc.gov/Daily_Releases/Daily_Business/1999/db991230/fcc99412.txt

Good Time at China Rose

MARA members and friends gathered at the China Rose restaurant for the annual Christmas dinner on Saturday December 18th for good food and good company. Comments from the attendees were all very positive.

The only down side to the dinner was that



Robin Walls N1NUO and XYL Robin N1NFK were unable to attend due to Mr. Robins unscheduled visit to the hospital for an operation. Robin was home by Christmas and was able to assist Ms. Robin back at Mid Coast Hospital New Years Eve to help provide Y2K communications.

Time To Cram For The February Exam

With Amateur Radio making a big change in license structure and code speed requirements, those of you that hold Novice or Tech plus ticket but dreaded that 13 WPM code speed are now in luck. But take note, the written exam may get tougher. However, If you have already passed the General written exam and hold a current element certification, come April 15th you can get your General license. Those of you that are General and

Advanced ticket holders can jump to Extra if you have passed the old Extra class written element within the last year and hold a current written element certificate. If you don't take advantage of this small window period before April 15th you will have to take the new Extra written exam that may be more comprehensive than the current exam element.

Crack open that study material and take a whack at the General or Extra written element on Saturday February 19th VE exam session at the Salvation Army building in Bath.



For those of you that need to pass your 5 WPM exam, Bruce Randall (W1ZE) is willing to start a code practice study group that could meet once or twice a week and help you get to the point where you can pass that damn code exam. That will start you on the path to exploring the HF spectrum and all Amateur Radio hobby has to offers.

Y2K Cardiac Arrest didn't happen; my lights are still on!

By W1ZE

As everyone now knows the predicted collapse of civilization, as we know it due to Y2K computer glitches didn't happen. I guess the billions of dollars spent were worth it.

If the collapse would have happened MARA members were there to help us all get through it. Dean Ridenour (N1GLV) was at his post in Parkview Hospital, Robin and Robin Walls (N1NFK and N1NUO) were camped out at Mid Coast Hospital, Mike Dudley (KB1DCU) and his grandpa, Loren Dudley (W1LHD), were manning the Bath Care Facility. With Chris McGraw (KB2SKP) was duty operator at the Sagadahoc EMA ham radio station at the Sagadahoc County Courthouse in Bath.

I monitored a lot of the communications between 11 PM and 1:30 AM on the 147.09 and 147.21 repeaters and was pleased to hear how well and competent the hams were. Great job folks. You made me proud to be part of a great hobby.

W5ES Electra-Slide Mobile Screwdriver Antenna.

The price is right

By Bruce Randall, W1ZE

After being away from HF mobile for several years I had the yen to do it again. Christmas 1998 had Santa leaving an Alinco DX-70TH transceiver under our Christmas tree for me. Since winters on the Maine coast are not conducive to working outside or in the garage, I put off installing the rig until May. During that time I had a lot of time to think of what type of antenna(s) to install. I started a search of the Internet for ideas and recommendations. I had read about the Screwdriver antenna and I was amazed on the vast amount of information available on the web. I got a copy of Don Johnson's (W6AAQ) book that describes his design of the Screwdriver antenna. I was impressed with his design and decided that was the type of antenna I was going to use.

I started looking at commercial versions like the High Sierra, Band Hopper, and other commercial screwdriver antennas but came down with sticker shock. I was about to call Don and purchase his design when I ran across an ad by W5ES (the El Paso Amateur Radio Clubs) where they offered a basic screwdriver antenna they build and sell to raise funds for the club. Don Johnson gave them permission to use his basic design. After a short phone conversation with the Clubs representative I ordered one for \$150 + shipping.

The Electra-Slide Antenna, as they call it, arrived in a heavy cardboard tube that included the antenna, toroid matching transformer, up-down switch and an instruction sheet. I had to supply the mount and the stainless steel buggy whip (available at Radio Shack). I found a convenient spot on my Toyota pick-up just behind the cab on the driver's side for the antenna. With the help of my local hardware emporium I obtained enough cold roll steel flat-bar and stainless steel fasteners to build a sturdy support and mounting bracket. Next I mounted the matching transformer in a small black (Radio Shack) plastic project box. I used the provided instructions and started trimming the whip to resonate the antenna at 29.6MHz. As recommended in Don Johnson's book, I installed a

50 pF ceramic disc capacitor across the output of the transformer to ground and obtain a low SWR on all the bands above 10 MHz in addition to the 80 to 30 meter bands. Since then I have employed a base impedance matching relay box that switches between the toroid (80 to 30meters) and two fixed ceramic disc capacitors (20 to 10 meter bands).



File photo of High Sierra Screwdriver Antenna

I consistently get reports from DX stations expressing their amazement that I am running a mobile antenna. I have compared my Electra-Slide performance against the High Sierra and other \$300+ screwdriver antennas and found out my antenna works just as well with half the investment.

The Screwdriver antenna is a great mobile antenna wither you spent \$300 or \$150. If the XYL will allow it on the family car, you will be pleased with its performance.

This article was originally posted on the K2BJ HF Mobile Radio web site <http://k2bj.com>

Goal of the M.A.R.A.

To provide an organization that can promote the hobby of Amateur Radio, provide a core group of skilled volunteer radio communicators for public service, and an association for people with a common interests.

In this process our organization provides a VHF and UHF radio repeaters, program meetings and participates in amateur radio and community special events.

We encourage you to participate and become involved in club activities. What our organization provides it's membership is in direct proportion to it's members participation. 73, W1ZE

Merrymeeting Amateur Radio Association

KS1R

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MARA MEETING

*Thursday, January 27th at the Salvation Army Building
25 Congress Avenue, Bath at 7PM*