

## ***Guide to Volunteering at an Amateur Radio Public Service Event***

### **VOLUNTEER EVENTS**

Amateur radio operators provide vital communications assistance at community events including festivals, parades, marathons, bicycle events, fairs, and more. It's rather simple and can be quite fun not to mention a great opportunity to people watch, make new friends, and be outside!

### **WHY VOLUNTEER?**

Amateur radio operators volunteer in the interest of participant and community safety while using these opportunities to practice and prepare their emergency communication skills.

### **STAYING COMPLIANT**

Regardless of the event organizer (a municipal or non-profit entity in most but not all cases), radio teams are careful to remain compliant with FCC Part 97 by 1) remaining volunteers focused on community safety/welfare while practicing emergency communication skills, and 2) avoiding becoming hired or employees of any organizer while 3) avoiding any material compensation. As a result, volunteers are unpaid though it is appropriate to accept offers of food, beverages, event clothing, and reimbursement for mileage if driving a personal vehicle during the event as a volunteer. More details may be found within our [Checklist for FCC Part 97 Compliance while Volunteering at Public Service Events](#).

### **TRAINING REQUIRED?**

In general, no special training is needed, and any licensed operator can do well at volunteering for public service events. That said, [this video about public service nets](#) as well as free, online training such as ICS 100 and ICS 700 through FEMA can expand your knowledge allowing you to bring more value as a volunteer; especially in an emergency.

### **WHAT TO BRING (checklist)**

Often, you don't need more than a handy talkie to volunteer. The amateur radio event coordinator will 1) provide details in advance regarding arrival time, location, maps, assignments, and frequencies, and 2) provide instruction on these and other details at the start of the event. To be prepared, consider having the following items with you:

- ✓ **HT Equipment** - radio, extra battery
- ✓ **Optional HT Equipment** - external mic, earpiece, antenna better than stock
- ✓ **Info** - radio organizer contact info, frequency plan, map, copy of your FCC license
- ✓ **Preparation** - load frequencies into memory, review instructions, plan departure/arrival time/parking, check the weather
- ✓ **Clothing** - layered outerwear, hat, sunglasses, water-proof gloves, yellow safety vest if not provided by organizer
- ✓ **Also (don't forget)** - water, sunscreen, snacks, cellphone, pen/paper

## TERMINOLOGY

There's a lot of terminology used at events and when describing the various types of assignments and it will vary from event to event. Here are a few that may be helpful...

- **Net Control:** The individual(s) who directs and coordinates all radio communications on the assigned frequency(s) and provide direction and information to radio volunteers.
- **Course Monitor:** A volunteer assignment to a location where participant progress and safety is monitored and reported along with weather and course conditions.
- **Aid Station, Mile Marker, Rest Stop, or Check Point:** A fixed location where a Course Monitor may be assigned.
- **Command Post/Shadow:** An operator assigned to be near or accompany event organizers to efficiently relay information.
- **Traffic:** The information radio operators are expected to convey. It may include your arrival or departure to your assigned location (check-in, check-out), your check-in/out for breaks, the passing of the first or last event participant, any medical needs, weather reports/concerns, supply requests, or participant needs such as transportation requests, bicycle breakdowns, or a need for medical assistance.
- **Patrols:** These radio operators are often on a bicycle or motorcycle or in their own vehicle and independently monitor course conditions, signage, participant safety, and weather. These volunteers do not carry tools or transport participants. These operators often employ APRS to allow Net Control to track their location.
- **Radio Equipped SAG Vehicle:** Some amateur radio volunteers at bike events ride along in a Support & Gear (SAG) vehicle equipped with tools, water, and first aid (sometimes replacement bikes too). When not helping a participant, they often shepherd riders on the course. These radio operators relay participant concerns/needs and course conditions to Net Control and receive traffic which instructs the vehicle where to provide assistance. APRS is often used to assist Net Control in monitoring SAG locations and efficiently assigning traffic. Generally, a SAG vehicle does not provide transportation services to participants.
- **Tactical Call Sign:** Volunteers may be assigned a call designation based on their volunteer role which might be used during the event instead or in addition to their amateur radio callsign (e.g. 'SAG-1', 'Bike-3', 'Rest-Stop 2', etc.) as per their instruction at the onset of the event.
- **Transport Vehicle:** Amateur radio operators are often assigned to (or may even operate) vehicles tasked with transporting participants off the course who cannot or do not wish to continue. For bike events, a bike rack is often required. Use of APRS is common.
- **Sweep Vehicle:** An amateur radio operator often rides with the vehicle that is following the final event participant to provide progress updates on the final clearing of the course and so no participant is left unattended. This leads to the release of volunteers, retrieval of course signage, and closing of rest stops. A SAG vehicle may be assigned this task. This role may sometimes be executed on a bicycle.