

The Amateur in You, Part 1

What have you been pondering?



Help for the unlicensed

A growing number of people are searching for ways of becoming better prepared, especially in light of recent political and weather-related events. This has led many to look into radio as a communication tool, including not only amateur (ham) radio, but [CB](#) (Citizens Band), [FRS](#) (Family Radio Service), [GMRS](#) (General Mobile Radio Service), [MURS](#) (Multi-Use Radio Service), and more.

To fill their radio needs, these earnest folks tend to ask questions such as *What radio is best to purchase for a preparation kit?* and *What frequencies can I turn to, during an emergency?* Out of fear or lack of experience, many of us hams hesitate to answer them, or worse, offer misleading advice. This short guide might give you, the licensed ham radio operator, a few tools to answer questions like these, of those who are honestly seeking good solutions. And who knows, maybe *you're* asking the same questions.

Limitations

Many of those who are looking for communication answers have already discovered walkie-talkie radios like those mentioned above. But they've no doubt found that they're only effective between family members within a few blocks of each other. They've heard that ham radios can extend that range from several to a thousand miles.

While a ham radio might be able to transmit with more power than a conventional walkie-talkie, that sort of reach can be attained using a handheld radio because of local repeaters and linked repeater systems. Without repeaters, a ham radio is not much better off than a bubble-wrapped Costco walkie-talkie. One can purchase a mobile ham radio, which transmits with even greater power, but the repeater limitation remains.

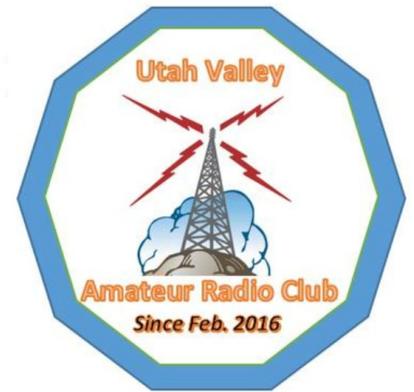
It's not until you purchase an HF ham radio, that you can truly be free of repeaters. But they're expensive, and requires some amount of education and experience to work effectively. And during times of low sunspot activity, you'll also need a General class license to operate one.



Available frequency bands

Many handheld ham radios are designed such that they will not allow you to transmit with them outside the amateur radio bands, without physically modifying their circuitry. Still, many handheld ham radios, especially those carrying the manufacturer names of Baofeng, Wouxun, TYT, Quansheng, QYT, and others, are marketed for not only the ham radio community, but much more. Those radios can transmit on amateur bands, plus Commercial, Public Safety, Air, Maritime, FRS, GMRS, MURS, and many more bands, and so become very sought-after by our unlicensed friends.

Radios that can transmit outside amateur radio bands are perfectly legal to purchase and sell in the US, just as your vehicle, which is capable of exceeding the speed limit, is perfectly legal for purchase and sale in the US. It remains the responsibility of the user or driver to operate within the law.



The Amateur in You, Part 1 *Continued*



Emergencies

Most of us understand that we can use any communication means available, toward the immediate safety of human life. It's often on this premise, that many of our unlicensed friends want to have available one or more radios, in the event of an incident. Frequencies for public safety, EMS (Emergency Medical Service), fire, and other critical-care agencies are available on free websites such as [RadioReference](#).

Ok, so they can purchase a radio, populate it with public safety and other emergency frequencies, and then stash it away for that rainy day. But when that incident occurs, will they know how to use that radio? You and I know those devices aren't exactly plug-and-play. Without a little practice, they might actually be more like plug-and-pray. But they can't practice using them without a license, and without that practice, their powerful, little tool will just be more dead weight.

But maybe we're not giving them enough credit. I mean, they're smart enough to have done all that research, and found that a ham radio is a good solution. However, during a time when their brains are trying to process an actual emergency, is that really a good time to stop everything long enough to try and figure out how to work all those buttons?

A ham license is the answer

For many of us amateur radio licensees, ham radio is a terrific hobby, yet we also know

that ham radio provides probably [the best preparedness solution](#) with the greatest flexibility. But many outside our craft are also aware of that fact, and that's why they came to you, asking about ham radio.

In response, be kind and understanding and helpful. Help them understand that operating a ham radio requires a license, which is not difficult for most to obtain, and doesn't require Morse code. Share some links to study resources, such as [HamStudy](#), and [how to use them](#). Turning them away, by sending them to Google, is not very helpful.



In the end, we need these good folks in the craft as much as they appear to need us. They provide us with new blood, modern insights, and a fresh perspective, while we can share with them our experience and skill we've gleaned over the time we've had our licenses.

Help them to understand that, once they obtain their Technician license and get a few months of experience behind them, they'll likely be better prepared to make an educated decision regarding radio. That's when they might be ready to upgrade to a General license, and venture into the world of HF, where they can finally communicate globally without relying on repeaters.