



The Amateur in You, Part 2

What have you been pondering?



Announcing private information

One day on social media, in the context of logging contacts, a person commented that he had nothing to hide. A second commenter asked, "So, what's your Social Security Number?" The first commenter then admitted that he indeed had *some things* to hide after all. On one hand, we each do have something to hide, and *should probably keep hidden* from most people. On the other hand, we also realize that much of



our personal information is available on the internet, if somebody really wants to find it. But that's *our* battle to fight.

If you're entrusted with *somebody else's* personal data, however, how much of it should you broadcast on the radio, if ever? Most will likely react quickly, and say that we should never give out personal information on the radio. Then again, if you're serving in an emergency radio capacity, and you're *asked for the information* by an official, should you freely broadcast it to the crowd who might be listening in? Most of us know that nothing on amateur radio is private, and in fact, there are always ham radio operators who are constantly scanning the frequencies for any kind of chatter.

There might indeed come a time when you're asked for sensitive information on the radio. These can include a person's name, age, gender, race, weight, nationality, address, phone number, medications, medical condition or history, extent or type of injury, location of incident, identifying marks, and much more. We have what's known as **HIPAA** (or **Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act**) laws in place, that attempt to keep some of this data private. Then again, we also have **Good Samaritan** laws that offer legal protection to those who give reasonable service to

others in need. So the bottom line is, you should do your best to keep other people's information private, but you're most likely protected, if you ever need to give it out.

If at all possible, ask that you *take the conversation to the phone*. If you can't, because maybe you're helping out with a remote rescue or you're trapped, you need to *use good judgment*. Sometimes, it helps to be a bit creative and use general terms, such as *young woman* or *not from our country* or *above average weight* or *in the northern Pleasant Grove area*, to hide the details.

Some have suggested encoding the message by some cryptographic means, but keep in mind that amateur radio rules prohibit the encoding of messages for the purpose of obscuring them. One way to possibly get around some of this today is to use a digital mode of radio operation, such as DMR, YSF, or D-STAR, which only a small number of radio operators know how to use. In time, however, that minority will likely turn into the majority, and digital will not be as "private" as it seems now. It'll be up to your creativity to come up with ways to keep personal information private when you need to.

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