



The Amateur in You, Part 2

What have you been pondering?



The ham police

Every so often one of us likes to joke that if we sing a line of *Happy Birthday* on the air, or fail to give our call sign, the *ham police* is going to come knocking on our doors. So, is there actually a *ham radio police force* or some such body that listens for rules violations? If so, who are they?

Official Observers

During the dawn of amateur radio, although many rules regarding frequency usage (allocation, bandwidth, power, etc.) and operating procedures were in place, violations were frequent and flagrant, more often because of equipment malfunction, but also due to malicious practices. At the same time, the federal government could not manage the volume of complaints about radio frequency interference and non-compliant stations. With the establishment of the FCC in 1934, the feds worked with the ARRL to establish a team of *Official Observers*, located at field offices, who [helped local amateurs](#) bring their equipment and practices into compliance.

For nearly 85 years, Official Observers have sent notifications to amateur operators for repeated violations, corrective action recommendations, and exemplary practice citations. Many will get on the air and help amateurs improve operating skills or explain how to correct certain problems. Their job is not to listen for every possible violation on every frequency, but more often to act upon complaints reported to the FCC, then referred to the Official Observer for evidence collection. *Official Observers themselves do not enforce the rules.*

Amateur Auxiliary

The Official Observer program is part of an arm of the ARRL known as the *Amateur Auxil-*

ary, which works closely with the Enforcement Bureau of the FCC. Their job is to oversee the work of interference monitoring and violation reporting. Their [main objective](#) is to encourage a wider knowledge of, and better compliance with, FCC rules.

Volunteer Monitors

In October 2019, the ARRL, in cooperation with the FCC, [established a program](#) called *Volunteer Monitoring*, which replaced and retired the Official Observer program. The FCC felt that, with the reduced number of field offices in recent years, they had to change their reporting mechanism of compliance violations in response.

The creation of the Volunteer Monitor program re-energized the enforcement efforts in the amateur radio bands. This was done by the FCC shifting the coordination of cases and evidence gathering to the ARRL, retaining for themselves the responsibility for decisions regarding final actions and enforcement. Unlike Official Observers, Volunteer Monitors serve for a maximum of three years, with up to three VMs per ARRL section.

Self-policing

Because the Amateur Auxiliary attempts to help amateurs remain knowledgeable and compliant, they foster the notion that amateur radio is a *self-policing* system. The idea is that, the better educated the amateur population is, the more compliant they'll be, and it's hoped that their general compliance will prompt peers to want to follow the rules as well. This way, while the FCC and Amateur Auxiliary don't have enough eyes and ears to listen for every issue, they're counting on all of us to assist and educate other hams.

So, who really is the ham police? You are.