

Editorial – Working an emergency

The Jazz game is about to start in six minutes, and you're fresh out of pizza. To some, that's an emergency. All joking aside, exactly what constitutes an **emergency**, and what are we amateurs legally permitted to operate during one? These and numerous related questions have surfaced on social media *ad nauseam*.

Although the actual word *emergency* is never defined in Part 97, according to section 97.403, ***No provision of these rules prevents the use by an amateur station of any means of radiocommunication at its disposal to provide essential communication needs in connection with the immediate safety of human life and immediate protection of property when normal communication systems are not available.***

Ok, so, what's an amateur station? According to section 97.3(a)(5), an amateur station is ***a station in an amateur radio service consisting of the apparatus necessary for carrying on radiocommunications.***

This seems to imply that a person can use any amateur equipment on any frequency to provide communication that's directly related to the safety of life and property. Since it states nothing about the licensure of the operator, it seems to further imply that an unlicensed person can legally use amateur equipment to save a life during an emergency.

While that usage does appear to be legal, it's also not likely that an unlicensed individual will have the skills necessary to operate such a station. And because the only way to learn how to use one is by usage and experience, the only legal way to obtain that experience is with a license.

According to section 97.101(b), none of us ***owns*** a frequency, and according to section 97.101(c), we must ***give priority*** to an emergency communication. But does that apply to repeaters? I mean, if somebody has an emergency, and I'm already using the repeater, yes, I understand that I must relinquish the repeater. But just as easily, why doesn't the operator take the emergency to another frequency? It's because repeaters, especially "ragchew" repeaters (those that are heavily used to shoot the breeze) are great for emergencies, since using them will give you the best chances of being heard by somebody who can render assistance.



And if you're concerned about somebody who's calling for help on their FRS radio, is it ok to answer their call on your ham radio that's been modified for FRS? According to section 97.111(a)(3), it is.

Is amateur radio the only way to communicate in an emergency? Of course not. ***Your phone is the first and best choice for emergency communication***, if the infrastructure is working. If it isn't, then you can resort to other forms, such as amateur, GMRS, FRS, and more.

Working an emergency takes patience and training. It's not easy to remember everything you're supposed to do and say when your bloodstream is pure adrenaline and you're hyperventilating. Even when things are crazy, it's a good idea to step back for a second and take a deep breath. Slow down your speech, or you'll say things you're going to regret later. Get involved with a couple of weekly nets to keep your skills up and your equipment ready. Volunteer to present a few training topics on the nets. Get involved with ARES and climb the ladder of certifications to make yourself even more useful.

Finally, here are a few other considerations for handling emergency communication:

- **How to set up a relay station**
- **Radio preparation prior to an emergency**
- **How to relay emergency messages**
- **Using tactical call signs**
- **How to answer a call for help**
- **How to help somebody in distress**
- **How to call out for help**
- **You are not a cop**

And so much more, that had to be omitted.

Anything to add? Email editor@utaharc.org