

Editorial – Rule, law, or tradition

Just like with fishing, hunting, practicing medicine, running a business, piloting an aircraft, or operating a motor vehicle, amateur radio operation requires a license. Similarly, not only do they all have **rules**, laws, and **regulations**, but also **traditions**, customs, courtesies, and gentleman's agreements. While some hard-fast rules are pretty clear, many enthusiasts are often confused about which "rule" is a law and which is a **courtesy** or tradition.

The CFR 47 Part 97 code is the rule of law by which we amateurs operate. Even though most licensed amateurs want to follow the rules, not everybody realizes which "rules" are actually **Part 97 laws** and which are not. For example, the requirement to announce your call sign every ten minutes is a rule of law (Part 97.119.a), while announcing your call sign at the start of a transmission is an optional and traditional courtesy.

The ARRL (American Radio Relay League) is a non-profit organization that often makes recommendations to the FCC regarding rules, but cannot enact the rules themselves. Still, in general we amateurs respect their word as orders to be followed. For example, the ARRL suggests that voice transmissions on 40 meters, 80 meters, and 160 meters use LSB (lower sideband), so we follow that **gentleman's agreement** as though it was law, but it isn't. So, if a licensed ham wanted to transmit using USB on 80 meters, it's not illegal to do so.

Likewise, band plans, like those **instituted by ARRL** and local sections are not law, but are agreements made by all of us to support a program of interference avoidance. Compliance with the **Utah Band Plan**, for example, helps us play nicely with each other. Still, neither band plan is a law, and so is not enforceable by public safety. Gentleman's agreements help reduce interference and allow us all to use the spectrum more effectively in a non-compulsory way.

So, if we licensed amateurs are obligated to follow the rule of law, how can we determine which rule is a law and which is a tradition? Honestly, the only way to know which item is a law is by studying the Part 97 contents. Here's an abbreviated list of actual Part 97 rules / laws:

- You must transmit your own call sign once per hour while operating at Field Day in behalf of a club (97.119.d)



- You must not interfere with another radio transmission (97.101.d)
- Music is prohibited from transmission on amateur frequencies (97.113.a.4)
- Antennas used for the 2200-meter and 630-meter bands must not exceed 60 meters in height (97.15.c)
- No amateur radio operator owns a frequency (97.101.b)
- If an email sent by the FCC to your email address bounces, it can result in revocation or suspension of your license (97.23)
- You may use CW on any frequency for which you have privileges, even those designated for voice or data (97.305.a)

Here's an abbreviated list of good practices that are traditions, courtesies, or gentleman's agreements, but still not regulations:

- You should not answer the call when somebody in your own country calls "CQ DX"
- Avoid doing CW on the Technician segment of the 10-meter band
- You should always say your full call sign, never a partial call sign
- Avoid on-the-air discussions of sensitive topics such as politics and religion
- It's poor practice to call CQ on a repeater
- Do not use the output frequency of a nearby repeater for simplex operation

Hopefully nothing on either list is surprising, and if it is, we hope it's educational. So, before you report a supposed violation, you should probably be aware whether the rule being violated is actually a law.

Anything to add? Email editor@utaharc.org