

AMATEUR RADIO GROUP SEEKS COMMON GROUND ON ANTENNAS

It seems like a lifetime ago that we had to rely on such antiquated notions of communication like home phones, answering machines, written letters and telegrams. In today's age of instant communication, we can check the weather, call the office, send an email and even update all of our virtual "friends" on Facebook from the most basic mobile device. In fact, if someone was to start a conversation about amateur radio (HAM radio), we'd probably give that person that same bemused smile we would convey to someone sharing insights into the Klingon seminar at the latest Star Trek Convention. HAM radio, however, continues to prove its worthiness as a means of modern communication, especially in times of man-made or natural disasters.

An amateur radio association called HAMS for Action (HFA) is reaching out to community associations, seeking to find common ground with association homeowners and boards on the benefits of allowing HAM enthusiasts to operate within agreed-upon community association governing regulations.

HAM radio emerged as a pursuit nearly 100 years ago when radio communications were cutting edge technology. In fact, the first directory, the *Wireless Bluebook of the Wireless Association of America*, was published in 1909. It listed amateur radio operators across the country. At its core, HAM radio is a network of individual operators who can communicate great distances by networking through other HAM operators by bouncing signals off the atmosphere and other techniques. The benefit of HAM communication is that it relies on a network of voluntary participants, and has no centralized nexus through which communication must pass. While a power outage may knock out cell phone towers across a wide region, or even take out internet hubs, HAM operators can network around the outage quickly and even be functioning and communicating as action is happening. In fact, after Hurricane Katrina, President Bush spoke to New Orleans officials via ham radio, and it was HAM operators who got the word out on the Chernobyl disaster and also the Indonesian Tsunami.

The challenge for most HAM operators in jurisdictions that have developed over the past 25 years frequently boils down to one issue --- antennas. The physics of radio dictate that the higher the antenna, the greater the communication range and the better the reception for both transmitting and receiving signals. Antennas of 100 or 150 feet are not uncommon among the more hard-core enthusiasts, although HFA Members acknowledge the aesthetic sensitivities of community associations and seek antenna heights of only 20 to 40 feet in association neighborhoods.

Meanwhile, municipal or association-imposed restrictions on antennas have been a significant challenge to the growing interest in amateur radio and for enthusiasts

operating in modern communities. And local or community association's restrictions are not the only voices in the antenna discussions: a few Congressional members have advocated legislation that would override even a municipality's or association's ability to regulate HAM antennas on the grounds of national security.

Recognizing that a confrontational approach serves neither the interest of HAMS or community associations, Don Schellhardt founded Hams for Action, a group dedicated to educating association residents about the benefits of HAM radio and the ways HAM operations can be made compatible with community association sensibilities and members supported rules on the matter. Don reached out to CAI to help start a dialogue on HAM issues.

"When the chips are down and communication is knocked out, there is a clear benefit to having a HAM operator in your neighborhood" he noted. "HAMS are a great tool to reach out to first responders in an emergency, and the rest of the time serve as both a rewarding hobby and a means of building community among communities." HFA is ultimately hoping to compile a directory of community associations that provides "reasonable accommodation" of modestly scaled HAM antennas.

CAI National and HAMS for Action will continue to exchange ideas on ways community associations and HAMS can co-exist as neighbors. Community associations confronting HAM or antenna issues have an opportunity to reach out to HAMS for Action as a resource on what sort of technology or practices may be acceptable, depending on the degree of antenna regulation in your community. The new website for HFA is <http://www.hfagroup.net/>.

DON SCHELLHARDT --- KI4PMG (djlaw@gmail.com) --- is Founder and President of [HAMS for Action](#) (HFA). This small but nationwide citizens group is working to make modest Amateur Radio Service antennas permissible in those community association neighborhoods where they are currently banned. Don is also an attorney in Ellington, Connecticut.