

What is Amateur Radio?

Amateur radio is one of those unique hobbies that no one really knows when and where it was born. It has been around as long as communications itself. The term "amateur" used here does not reflect on the quality of the individual or his desire for service, but is used by the Federal Communications Commission to refer to that group of licensed experimenters and hobbyists who provide communications without remuneration.

The "Birth Certificate" of amateur radio would list such notables as Marconi, Edison, Steinmetz; and the "Family Tree" will include names like Hiram Percy Maxim, Senator Barry Goldwater, Sr., Arthur Godfrey, General Curtis LeMay (Ret.), and a host of other notables from news anchors, to country singers and astronauts. Ours is a worldwide family of individuals, with diverse backgrounds from all walks of life, but each of us has a desire to serve through experimentation and public service.

Amateur radio operators are often referred to as HAMS. Over the years the true origin of this term has been lost. There are several theories, some more plausible than others. One story originates from an early little amateur radio station. In the early days the government did not assign station call letters. Supposedly, three students at Harvard named Hyman, Almay, and Murray set up a station. They decided to use their initials as the call. Thus we have the little station HAM. Another story is that the early commercial telegraphy operators referred to the amateurs as "ham-fisted" morse code operators – a term that stuck. Whatever the history, we proudly refer to ourselves as HAMS.

From the beginning of electronic experimentation in communications, there have been individuals dedicated to making improvements in communication techniques. They have invested their own money and time in experiments as amateur radio operators, and have given the world a wealth of communications knowledge. Amateurs conducted much of the early experimentation in moon-bounce, microwaves and television. HAMS regularly communicate around the world using all of the available techniques - single sideband (SSB), frequency modulation (FM), amateur television (ATV), microwave, moon-bounce, radio-teletype (RTTY), continuous wave (CW using International Morse Code) and satellite communications.

Citizens residing in disaster prone areas of our country are well acquainted with the quality of emergency communications provided by amateur radio operators. From the hurricane prone Gulf Coast to the flood prone mountains of Appalachia - from the tornado valley of the Midwest to the earthquake zones of California - millions of Americans have relied on HAM radio operators to provide communications to the outside world in the aftermath of disasters. When commercial power and communications fail, amateurs in the Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES) organization "crank-up" the emergency power and use their own personal equipment to become the world's most effective disaster communications team.

There are amateur radio operators in over 300 countries and over 700,000 licensed amateur radio operators in the United States. Each realizes that there is no "inherent right to operate," but that amateur radio is a privilege granted by international treaty through the World Administrative Radio Conference for amateur operators. For that reason, HAMS police their own ranks to weed out those whose violations of regulations place the entire amateur radio hobby in jeopardy.

For more information on becoming a licensed amateur radio operator, contact the **Platinum Coast Amateur Radio Society (PCARS)**, PO Box 1004, Melbourne, FL 32902-1004 or www.pcars.org

PCARS Melbourne Repeaters – W4MLB -- 146.25/146.85 & 146.01/146.61