

Silent Key Estate Planning — A Guide

A ham who has assisted with several Silent Key estates offers advice for helping your family — or the families of your ham friends — figure out what to do with a loved one's gear.

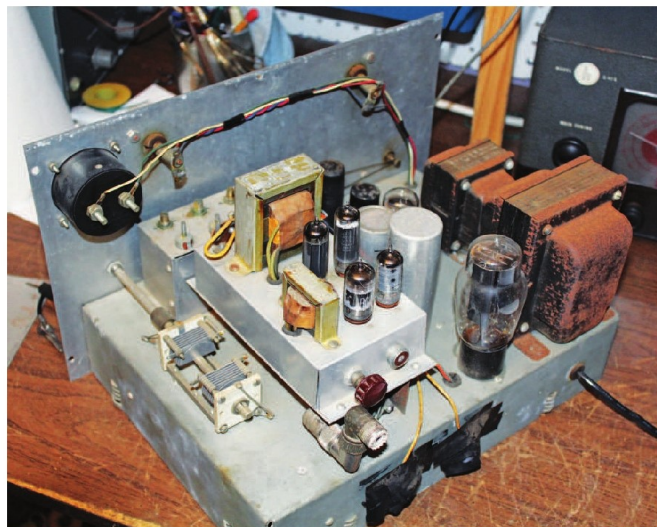
Dino Papas, KLØS

Each of us will inevitably become a Silent Key someday, and unfortunately that day may arrive unexpectedly. We need to prepare ahead of time to make it as simple as possible for our families, the majority of whom are probably not hams, to know what to do with our equipment.

Many of us take the time to ensure that our wills, trusts, powers of attorney, and advanced medical directives are current, but few of us pay attention to what will happen to our radio-related belongings. Families who don't know what these specialty items are worth may turn to a one-time estate purchaser who removes the burden of a lengthy disposal process — at least one such estate buyer advertises in the back of *QST*.

Some families may want to memorialize their departed ham by donating the ham's equipment, technical library, QSL cards, and other items to worthy hams or ham organizations. Local Amateur Radio clubs may also offer a service to dispose of a deceased ham's possessions (if not, talk to your club's leadership about organizing such a program).

Hams who have prearranged the disposition of their equipment stand the best chance of making sure their wishes are fulfilled — and that their family recoups a realistic amount from the sale of the items.



An inside view of Ron Pollack's, K2RP, Lysco Model 600 transmitter, prior to restoration. This classic radio would be difficult to value, especially for a non-ham, as it has a unique history and has been modified. Including this as an item on an inventory list would be a great help to your loved ones, with details about its functionality, history, part replacements, and estimated value. [Ron Pollack, K2RP, photo]

Planning Ahead: Tips for Hams

- ✓ Have a current will (or a trust, if appropriate) and an advanced medical directive in place.
- ✓ Tell your family how to report your passing to ARRL for inclusion in *QST*'s Silent Keys listing.
- ✓ Direct your family to the FCC's website (<https://www.fcc.gov/wireless/support/universal-licensing-system-uls-resources/cancelling-license-universal-licensing>) for information on how to cancel your Amateur Radio license or how a family member can initiate a request to be assigned your call.
- ✓ Create a file or binder that includes your important ham radio-related documents. Keep it in an accessible place that your family and a ham representative know about.
- ✓ Consider drafting your own obituary and including information about the ham radio part of your life.

Designating a Representative

Because family members may not know our ham friends, it's a good idea to designate a willing and able ham friend to act as your ham estate representative. Being active in your local Amateur Radio club can offer a source of hams who may be willing to assist your family. Once you've chosen a representative and they have agreed, you can host a joint meeting with them and your family's decision makers to ensure the ham part of your estate will be handled the way you want.

Donation Options

If you want to donate equipment directly to other ham family members, friends, or your club, then you should make those wishes known

Helping a Silent Key's Family: Things to Remember

Everyone has their own way of working through grief, on their own time. Simply letting the family know you're willing to help is a good place to start. They'll seek you out when the time is right.

Once the family is ready, if you haven't already had a detailed discussion with them, ask how you can help. Guide your actions by asking yourself, "What if this were my family? How would I want my ham estate representative to treat them?"

Make sure they know that you are looking out for their best interests, and your efforts will be directed only toward the ham radio part of their loved one's estate. As the family may not know the value of ham radio gear, you can help manage their expectations by referring them to sale listings from hamfests or online sellers. The key is to stay realistic about what does and does not have salvageable value. Old used coax and connectors, equipment carcasses, outdated component collections, etc., may be recycled or disposed of appropriately. Many localities have periodic electronics recycling programs.

Once you have an idea of the scope of the effort, meet with the family to decide how to proceed, and come up with a realistic timeline for disposing of equipment.

Towers and antennas can be problematic and may require the services of a professional to remove. Some hams have had success with offering to give a tower and antenna system away to someone who is willing to take it down and remove it. Make sure the family keeps potential personal injury insurance liabilities in mind if they consider offering the items under these conditions.

Another consideration, if you are able, would be to offer a reasonable price for the estate equipment and then keep or dispose of the items at your own pace, thus ensuring the family receives a timely, reasonable payment, and you can decide how to recoup your costs and what to keep to remind you of your friend. This also gives you more flexibility in selling the equipment on consignment at local hamfests, as you will be more invested in bringing in the highest return.

Working within your club to help with disposal is also a good idea. Technically oriented members of your club can test electronic items and document their status. Some hams may be interested in non-working equipment they can repair themselves, but sale prices for non-working items should be set accordingly. Your representative/club can also consider hosting an auction to dispose of materials.

ahead of time. The ARRL Laboratory also accepts donations of clean Amateur Radio equipment and electronic test gear from a nonsmoking environment to help support its various programs. ARRL is a tax-exempt, nonprofit organization as described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, and holds a federal tax identification for which contributions are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law. As a not-for-profit organization, ARRL is not allowed to place a value on your donation; that is a matter for you or your representative. Recent changes to US federal tax codes may impact the resolution of your estate; check with your tax professional for advice.

Get Organized

Noel Beardsley's, K8NB, article, "Inventory List," in the April 2018 issue of *QST*, describes how to take the important first step of creating a detailed inventory of equipment to assist your family in preparing your equipment for sale and/or donation.

Disposing of Estate Items

- ✓ Prepare lists of equipment for sale, which your local clubs can distribute to members.
- ✓ Announce the availability of unique equipment on HF/VHF "for sale" nets and special-interest email reflectors (Drake, Collins, military equipment, test gear, etc.).
- ✓ Be a motivated seller, and try to maximize the return to the family.
- ✓ Keep a good record of the items sold and their sales price.
- ✓ Provide sales proceeds to the family at reasonable time intervals instead of waiting until the liquidation process is complete.
- ✓ Consider gathering a few small mementoes, such as the Silent Key's call sign badge, ham-related pictures, articles, and a copy of QST's "Silent Keys" that includes their loved one's call sign. Organize the materials into a file or binder to help the family remember how important Amateur Radio was to their loved one.

Organizing equipment manuals, receipts, original packing materials, and repair records in a centralized location is a good start for loved ones.

Though it's not pleasant to contemplate one's own death, a bit of planning can make that eventuality a little easier for the loved ones that we leave behind. Helping a Silent Key's family will not necessarily be easy, but it's a worthwhile and potentially satisfying thing to do.

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