

## Second Century

# Beware the Ides of March

*This line from Shakespeare's Julius Caesar signifies impending doom. Today, it is used in popular vernacular as advanced warning of a threat. And for radio amateurs today, the threats to our hobby abound.*

The threats we know, that lie within, are well-known to us: interference getting into, or out of, the shack; RFI; a literally hot mic; a refrigerator control panel locking up, or a powered-off television jumping to life and behaving strangely. Ensuring that antennas are properly grounded and that RF chokes are used on feed lines and in the shack is an easy way to challenge the threat.

Another threat comes from exposure to RF. Have you used the ARRL RF Exposure Calculator to determine if your combination of antenna, placement, and power is safe? It is a responsibility you must fulfill to ensure the safety of your station. It is also important to understand where the high voltage points are on an antenna to protect yourself and others from injury.

Beyond the self-created threats we must manage comes the RFI from poorly designed electronics that are sold today. Starting within your own house can be an eye-opener: LED lightbulbs, wall-wart-style power supplies, internal power supplies within a desktop computer, battery chargers — the list goes on and on. Tracking down the RFI within your own domain is fairly easy.

Moving beyond your property becomes a more serious challenge. Neighbors using any of the above may be easy to track down, but the problems they create may be impossible to solve. Elements of commercial power lines may cause interference and be difficult to track down precisely and solve. If you're stumped and need help, this is one area where the Technical Information Service (TIS) of the ARRL Lab can help.

Looking at the bigger picture, we see threats to our spectrum from interference. At the 2024 ARRL Annual Meeting of the Board of Directors, the strongest position yet was taken in opposition to the Shortwave Modernization Coalition — a group advancing the interests of stock traders. The stations being constructed and oper-

ated use high power and propose to transmit adjacent to our bands. We will be exploring ways our Volunteer Monitors can observe their signals and record interference.

Perhaps our longest-standing efforts have been toward finding solutions to the threats that community-based rules and regulations pose to putting up an antenna and getting on the air. We've been working diligently in Washington to find a solution. But Washington is now a very different place than it was when we started requiring specialists on both sides of the aisle to assist in our efforts. And our scope has also changed as more government agencies require our attention and interaction in promoting and protecting our privileges.

How can you help? There are many ways! Some key suggestions include: Run a clean station by minimizing RFI, and look out for your fellow radio amateurs, and politely let them know if they might have an issue. Be alert to potential threats and limitations being posed by your city or state, and consider contributing to the ARRL funds we designate for Spectrum Defense and Legislative Advocacy.

In closing, this is arguably the greatest benefit you receive as an ARRL member: the national and international advocacy to protect our bands from all threats. Be radio active: protect our privileges by using them! Be a connector: help other hams solve their RFI problems. And don't forget the ARRL Lab is here to assist in your efforts.



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