



It Seems to Us

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Re-Entry

“A new FCC rule should interest anyone who previously held a General, Advanced, or Amateur Extra class license, let it lapse, and would like to get back into Amateur Radio.”

The August 2014 issue of *QST* reported the outcome of an FCC rule making proceeding, WT Docket No. 12-283, that dealt with several matters relating to licensing, examinations, and the use of TDMA emissions. The resulting changes to Part 97 of the FCC Rules took effect on July 21, and have been generally applauded by the Amateur Radio community.

Of particular significance to many former radio amateurs is an amendment to §97.505(a). This rule now instructs Volunteer Examiners to give credit for Elements 3 and 4 to an examinee holding an expired Amateur Extra class license, and credit for Element 3 to an examinee holding an expired Advanced or General class license. A longstanding provision that gave Element 3 credit to holders of “old” Technician licenses issued before March 21, 1987, when the Technician and General licenses had the same written exam, has been retained.

This change means that the FCC will issue a General license to someone who passes Element 2 (the current Technician exam) and demonstrates that they previously held an Advanced or General license without requiring that they retake and pass the Element 3 exam. Similarly, former Extras can regain their full-privilege licenses simply by passing Element 2.

The thought behind this accommodation of former licensees is that the Commission is willing to assume there is little or no difference between their qualifications and those of licensees who happened to complete the administrative process of renewing their licenses before their grace period expired. That’s a reasonable assumption, and making the former licensee pass the current entry-level exam is a reasonable requirement to verify their commitment and their familiarity with the current rules.

While the news cannot yet have reached more than a small fraction of those who could benefit, the ARRL VEC Department reports that applicants already are taking advantage of this new opportunity. How do we get the word out to the rest?

This, dear reader/member, is where you come in. If you know someone who would qualify, pass it on!

But don’t stop there. Explain that ham radio is better than ever, with new worlds to explore. The good things they remember are still here, but there’s so much more! New digital data and voice modes — even new bands. Software defined radios that range from super-cheap to incredibly versatile. Ingenious new antenna designs for portable, mobile, and fixed station operation. Kits that outperform anything that ever came out of Benton Harbor. Compact gear that can be taken anywhere, with features that didn’t exist when their license lapsed.

While the rule change opens up new possibilities, there is no reason to limit our outreach just to these former licensees. The same pitch is appropriate for other audiences. Inactive hams who still have their licenses. Former Novices and Technicians. Anyone who thought about becoming a ham somewhere along the way but never quite made it, either because of the former Morse code requirement, or for some other reason.

What’s more, they are needed. In many places, the existing pool of trained operators for public service and emergency preparedness activities is not as big as it should be; their participation would be welcomed and would benefit their local communities. The knowledge, skills, and personal contacts they have developed in other walks of life can be put to good use through Amateur Radio.

We all know people, perhaps in our own families, who still hold licenses but are out of touch with today’s Amateur Radio. Reaching out to inactive hams should be fairly easy; even if we don’t know them personally, they’re in the FCC database. By using the search tool on the ARRL website, at www.arri.org/fcc/search, you can find every licensee in your city or ZIP Code.

Getting the message to former hams is more challenging. In our mobile society the “shelf life” of contact information is rather short, so old addresses are of limited value. Yet, there are hundreds of thousands of people across the United States who tried Amateur Radio at an earlier point in their lives but let their licenses lapse. Perhaps they were Novices when the license had a 1-year or 2-year term and was not renewable; in those days it was “up or out.” Maybe the initial spark of interest didn’t ignite, or life simply got in the way. Education, career, and family considerations can (and should!) come before one’s avocation, and are bound to interfere to some extent. In the later phases of one’s life, there may be more time to devote to earlier interests. All it may take to rekindle an interest is a reminder of the joy that came with the initial discovery of the world of Amateur Radio.

The ARRL’s Centennial Year has been an energizing event. As we launch the Second Century, let’s harness some of that energy to share our passion with those around us, either as individuals or through our clubs. This is always worth doing, but especially now, with the FCC offering an easier path to re-entry.