

# Still “Successfully Dying” After All These Years

The drumbeat of misinformation continues unabated among many of our fellow hams—“Ham radio is dying.” “Our numbers are dropping.”—often including hams who convey this “information” to the news media, which unknowingly reinforce the perception among the general public that ham radio is on its way out.

**Fact<sup>1</sup>:** As of May 31, 2010, there were 691,982 active licenses in the FCC amateur radio database. After adjusting for a change in the way the FCC kept track of its statistics back in 1997, this represents the *all-time high number of amateur radio licensees*.

**Fact<sup>2</sup>:** As of June 18, 2010, nearly 17,000 new people had joined the ranks of amateur radio licensees *so far this year*. This is 3000 people more than the same point last year (a record-setting year for new hams), and 600 people more than became hams in the *entire year of 2005*.

## But Are They Active?

A few weeks ago at Ham-Com in Texas, a ham asked me where I thought the hobby was heading. I said I believe the future looks bright and that we are at or near our all-time high number of licensees (I didn’t have the above stats handy at the time).

“But how many of them are active?” he responded.

“That’s the \$64,000 question,” I said, adding, “and that answer depends on how you define active.”

“Well, I judge by the number of lookups a person has on QRZed,” he replied. “The more lookups they have, the more active they are.”

His method is valid ... to a point. A high number of lookups on QRZ.com probably does indicate a high level of on-air activity, but more specifically, it generally indicates a high level of *HF* activity, for which QSL cards are most commonly exchanged. On the other hand, the ham who is very involved in his local radio club, participates regularly in public service and emergency communications, and maybe helps keep the club repeater on the air ... but isn’t on HF very much ... may not meet the “QRZ standard” for being considered “active.”

Neither would the ham whose main activity involves talking with longtime friends in different parts of the world, who don’t need his QSL card and wouldn’t need to look him up on QRZ, even if he talked on the air with them every day or every week.

Neither would the ham whose primary interests lie in experimenting, designing, and building new things, and whose on-air activity may be limited to testing out a new piece of gear or some new software. This amateur may be actively advancing the radio art, but might not be considered “active” based on his number of QRZ lookups.

The FCC used to have an activity standard for renewing your license. Back in the day, you needed to show you had been on the air for minimum amount of time in order to qualify for renewal<sup>3</sup>. It was an arbitrary standard, to be sure, but a standard nonetheless. This requirement went away in the late 1970s, though, and since then, the definition of an “active” ham has been subject to wide interpretation. The fact is that activity levels are difficult to quantify, or to qualify, which is why we have to rely on licensing statistics to assess the health of the hobby. So let’s look at some licensing statistics:

## Crunching the Numbers

There is widespread agreement that the so-called “gold-

\*e-mail: <w2vu@cq-amateur-radio.com>



*More than 130 Scouts from the Dallas area attended a daylong Radio Merit Badge course at the Ham-Com hamfest in June. All of them learned about ham radio and four went home with licenses.*

en age” of ham radio was in the 1950s and 1960s, when American-made equipment dominated the market for commercially-built gear and when solid-state technology had not yet made enough inroads to displace tube gear and discrete components, making it still quite feasible for individual hams to build and repair their own radios. No fancy microprocessors, no microscopic surface-mount components. Real components and real tubes for real radios built by real hams.

In 1960, according to ARRL statistics, there were 227,500 “real hams” in the United States. Let us assume, since this was the Golden Age, that every one of those 227,500 hams was active on the air on a regular basis, easily meeting the FCC activity requirement.

Now let’s look at 2010, as ham radio suffers through its supposed death-throes. Let’s say that only one-third of our current roughly 700,000 licensees are actually active on the air on a regular basis. Let’s see... that’s 700,000 times point-3-3-3 ... and that comes out to ... 233,100, or over 5000 more active hams today than the total number of licensed hams in 1960. If we make the numbers a little more realistic and assume that “only” 75% of 1960 hams were active and that 50% of today’s hams are active (by whatever definition you choose), that would give us approximately 346,000 active hams now vs. 170,625 in 1960, or *roughly double the number of active hams today than in the so-called Golden Age*.

It is oh-so-clear that ham radio is dying. Another fact is that old-timers have been predicting the imminent death of ham radio ever since it came back from the dead at the end of World War II. It’s never been quite the same as it was in the past, and the operators just aren’t like they were in the good old days. Ham radio was going to be killed off by, successively, the Novice and Technician licenses, CB, computers, cell phones, the internet, and social networking. Each of these supposed threats has, in fact, contributed to its vitality. I will repeat once again—for the benefit of the 100,000+ new people who have joined our ranks in the past four years and haven’t heard my favorite slogan before—“Ham radio: Successfully dying for more than 60 years.”

*(Continued on page 10)*

• **The following Special Event stations are scheduled for August:**

**W1H**, in commemoration of Hiram Percy Maxim, W1AW, who married the daughter of the governor of the State of Maryland and is buried in Hagerstown, MD's Rose Hill Cemetery; Antietam Radio Association (W3CWC) on Aug. 14–15. Frequencies: 14.290, 7.178, 3.902 MHz ±QRM. Also on W3CWC's two repeaters. Special QSL card for an SASE and contact information sent to WA3EOP (address available at QRZ.com) or to: W3CWC, Antietam Radio Association, P.O. Box 52, Hagerstown, MD 21741.

**K5R**, 5th annual special event station K5R to commemorate the anniversaries of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Hammond, Louisiana; Southeast Louisiana Amateur Radio Club (SELARC); Aug. 28 and 29 from 1400–2000 UTC each day. Club members will be operating on 7.250 and 14.250 MHz (±QRM), and also in other areas of the general portions of the HF bands. Send an SASE for a QSL to: SELARC/K5R, P.O. Box 1324, Hammond, LA 70404. More information: <http://www.selarc.org> or on the Yahoo group site: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/K5R>.

**K8FBN**, from the 29th Annual Sweet Corn Festival, Fairborn, Ohio, Aug. 21 and 22. Operations on 75, 40, and 20 meters SSB and PSK-31. QSL to K8FBN, 36 E. Routzong Drive, Fairborn, OH 45324.

**W8AL**, from the Pro Football Hall of Fame Festival, Canton ARC; Aug. 5–8 from 1300–2400Z each day on 7.265 and 14.265 MHz. For unfolded certificate send 9 ξ 12 SASE to Donald E. Perry, WQ8J, 968 Culverne Ave. NW, Massillon, OH 44647.

• **The following hamfests, etc., are slated for August:**

Aug. 21–22, Huntsville Hamfest & ARRL SE Division Convention, Von Braun Center, Huntsville, Alabama. For details go to: <www.hamfest.org>. **See us at the CQ Booth.**

Aug. 22, **Denver Radio Club Hamfest**, Jefferson County Fairgrounds, Golden, Colorado. (Talk-in 145.490 or 448.625 [both 100 Hz]; exams 10 AM). Contact Bryan Steinberg, KBØA: <drcfest@w0tx.org>.

Aug. 22, **2010 East Central Illinois Hamfest**, Vermilion County Fairgrounds, Danville, Illinois. Contact Kathy Tucker, KD5GPR, e-mail: <gkt6399@aol.com>, phone: 217-765-2098; <www.vcarahamfest.info>

Aug. 28, **Owen-Monroe Amateur Radio Hamfest**, Owen County Fairgrounds, Spencer, Indiana. Co-sponsored by Owen County ARA and Bloomington ARC. Contact Katie Smith, K9INU, e-mail: <k9inu@arrl.net>, phone: 812-829-2149. (Talk-in 146.985, 136.5 PL; exams 1 PM)

Aug. 28–29, **Boxboro ARRL New England Convention**, Holiday Inn, Boxborough, Massachusetts. For details go to: <www.boxboro.org>. **See us at the CQ Booth.**

Aug. 28–29, **The Kansas QSO Party**, CQ KsQP. Information: <http://www.ksqsoparty.org/>.

**zero bias** (from page 8)

**A Great Idea**

Oh, and as far as all those kids who are no longer getting interested in ham radio, Ham-Com featured a day-long Radio Merit Badge program for Scouts from throughout the Dallas area. More than 130 boys attended and virtually all earned their merit badges and got an introduction to ham radio through not only their lessons and demonstrations, but also through their free admission to the hamfest.

Plus, the hamfest committee agreed to pay the exam fee for any Scout who studied ahead of time and came to the show with proof of having scored at least 80% at least three times on online practice tests. Four young men brought in the required paperwork, and all four went home at the end of the day as newly-licensed amateurs. Congratulations to them, and to the Ham-Com committee for such a wonderful idea. May you be widely copied, to help make sure that ham radio continues “successfully dying” for at least another 60 years.

73, W2VU

1. Courtesy Joe Speroni, AHØA, <www.ah0a.org>; May is the last full month for which statistics were available at press time.

2. Courtesy Allen Pitts, W1AGP, ARRL Media Relations Director

3. In 1970, Section 97.3 of the FCC rules said a ham seeking to renew a license needed to be able to demonstrate a minimum of 2 hours of operating time in the 3 months preceding the renewal application, or a minimum of 5 hours in the preceding 12 months. The rules at the time also required all transmissions to be logged.

**EDITORIAL STAFF**

Richard S. Moseson, W2VU, Editor  
Gail M. Sheehan, K2RED, Managing Editor

**CONTRIBUTING EDITORS**

Rich Arland, K7SZ, Learning Curve  
Kent Britain, WA5VJB, Antennas  
Brittany Decker, KB1OGL, Kids' Korner  
John Dorr, K1AR, Contesting  
Joe Eisenberg, KØNEB, Kit-Building  
Richard Fisher, K16SN, Public Service  
Cam Hartford, N6GA, QRP  
Tomas Hood, NW7US, Propagation  
Joe Lynch, N6CL, VHF  
Frederick O. Maia, W5Y1, FCC Correspondent  
Irwin Math, WA2NDM, Math's Notes  
Ted Melinosky, K1BV, Awards & USA-CA  
Jeff Reinhardt, AA6JR, Mobile/Radio Magic  
Don Rotolo, N2IRZ, Digital  
Carl Smith, N4AA, DX  
Gordon West, WB6NOA, At-Large  
John Wood, WV5J, What's New  
Wayne Yoshida, KH6WZ, The Ham Notebook

**AWARD MANAGEMENT**

Floyd Gerald, N5FG, WAZ Award  
Steve Bolia, N8BJQ, WPX Award  
Ted Melinosky, K1BV, USA-CA Award  
Billy Williams, N4UF, CQ DX Award

**CONTEST MANAGEMENT**

Robert Cox, K3EST, WW DX Contest Director  
John Lindholm, W1XX, VHF Contest Director  
Randy Thompson, K5ZD, WPX Contest Director  
John Sweeney, K9EL, DX Marathon Director  
Andy Blank, N2NT, 160M Contest Director  
Ed Muns, WØYK, RTTY Contest Director

**BUSINESS STAFF**

Richard A. Ross, K2MGA, Publisher  
Don Allen, W9CW, Advertising Manager  
Jon Kummer, WA20JK, New Media  
Emily Leary, Sales Coordinator  
Sal Del Grosso, Controller  
Doris Watts, Accounting Department

**CIRCULATION STAFF**

Melissa Gilligan, Operations Manager  
Cheryl DiLorenzo, Customer Service Manager  
AnnMarie Auer, Customer Service

**PRODUCTION STAFF**

Elizabeth Ryan, Art Director  
Barbara McGowan, Associate Art Director  
Dorothy Kehrwieler, Production Director  
Emily Leary, Production Manager/Webmaster  
Hal Keith, Illustrator  
Larry Mulvehill, WB2ZPI, Staff Photographer  
Doug Bailey, KØFO, Website Administrator

A publication of



CQ Communications, Inc.  
25 Newbridge Road  
Hicksville, NY 11801 USA.

CQ Amateur Radio (ISSN 0007-893X) Volume 66, No. 8. Published monthly by CQ Communications, Inc., 25 Newbridge Road., Hicksville, NY 11801, Telephone 516-681-2922. E-mail: cq@cq-amateur-radio.com. Fax 516-681-2926. Web site: www.cq-amateur-radio.com. Periodicals Postage Paid at Hicksville, NY 11801 and at additional mailing offices. Subscription prices (all in U.S. dollars): Domestic-one year \$36.95, two years \$66.95, three years \$96.95; Canada/Mexico-one year \$49.95, two years \$92.95, three years \$135.95; Foreign Air Post-one year \$61.95, two years \$116.95, three years \$171.95. U.S. Government Agencies: Subscriptions to CQ are available to agencies of the United States government including military services, only on a cash with order basis. Requests for quotations, bids, contracts., etc. will be refused and will not be returned or processed. Entire contents copyrighted 2010 by CQ Communications, Inc. CQ does not assume responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. Allow six weeks for change of address.

Printed in the U.S.A.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:  
CQ Amateur Radio, 25 Newbridge Rd., Hicksville, NY 11801