

Mythbusting

Myth (n): 2. a: a popular belief or tradition that has grown up around something or someone; b: an unfounded or false notion (Merriam-Webster.com)

There's a wonderful TV show on the Discovery Channel called "Mythbusters," in which the hosts put various common beliefs to the test and either confirm or refute them. On the show, this usually involves blowing things up, hurling projectiles at high speeds, or doing other visually-exciting things.

We have some ham radio myths we'd like to put to the test as well, but since we haven't yet mastered the art of blowing things up on a printed page and don't have the resources to test, say, whether an old tube-style radio, commonly called a "boatanchor," will actually keep a boat from floating away with the tide, we'll have to rely for our tests on old-fashioned concepts such as words and numbers.

Myth #1: Ham Radio is Shrinking/Dying

I've lost track of how many times we've covered this here, but this bit of misinformation simply won't go away. Various hams have been predicting the imminent end of ham radio nearly since it returned to the air after World War II. Fact: As of November 30, 2010 (the latest date for which statistics were available as this is written), there were 695,457 active amateur licenses in the FCC database, according to ah0a.org. This is the highest number ever. Period. For more analysis of our current licensing numbers, see my August 2010 editorial.

Myth #2: Ham Radio is Old-Fashioned

Even I have been guilty of this one on occasion in this age of Blackberries, Twitter, and various iThings, comparing ham radio to horseback riding or sailing, both of which continue to thrive despite their not being the most efficient means of getting from one place to another. But I was brought up short on this by my son, Dan (KC2OOM), who said: "Building your own satellites is old-fashioned? Bouncing signals off of meteor trails and the moon is old-fashioned? Software-defined radio is old-fashioned?" I learned long ago not to argue such things with my kids ... especially when they're right.

Myth #3: Morse Code Usage Will Die Off Now That It's No Longer Required

It has now been four years since the FCC eliminated the Morse code testing requirement for all classes of amateur radio licenses in the United States. It was predicted by many at the time that without the license requirement, code usage would quickly drop off. Yet nearly from the beginning, we've heard reports of growing numbers of hams getting on the CW bands, operating slowly and building up their skills, and of newly-licensed hams saying they now *wanted* to learn code even though they no longer had to. Numbers of logs submitted in our CW contests have continued to grow, often setting records, and the number of stations worked in those logs has grown as well. Plus, in a fascinating analysis in this month's issue of our sister magazine, *WorldRadio Online*, columnist Randall Noon, KC0CCR, used published Field Day statistics to conclude that the number of *active* hams has increased steadily in recent years, as well as the number of active

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hams using CW. The number of CW QSOs reported for Field Day has grown by nearly 40,000 from 2005 to 2010! You can read his complete article by downloading the current issue of *WRO* at <<http://www.worldradiomagazine.com>>.

Morse code is even showing up on Twitter! When Oregon Congressman Greg Walden, who's also K7EQI, was named to chair the subcommittee whose responsibilities include overseeing the FCC, he notified his "followers" via Twitter with a short Morse code message:

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("Will chair comm and tech sub 73s w7eqi")

Myth #4: Electronic Confirmations Will Doom Traditional QSL Cards

The use of electronic confirmation systems for contacts—such as eQSL and the ARRL's Logbook of the World (LoTW)—keeps growing, but apparently that is not having a negative impact on the exchange of traditional QSL cards. The ARRL announced in mid-December that 2010 had seen "a dramatic increase" over 2009 in the number of cards received from members for its outgoing QSL bureau, which routes cards to hams around the world. The number of cards processed jumped 16% to more than 700,000 (and there were still two weeks left in the year). Likewise, DX cards coming to the League's incoming QSL bureaus were up significantly as well, as were DXCC award applications (up 13%).

Online confirmations may be quick and efficient for building up award credits, but QSL cards were always about much more than operating awards. They are graphic representations of the worldwide reach of our hobby. A collection of colorful QSL cards from around the world has always been among the most cherished possessions of most active hams. Apparently, it still is.

Myth #5: Hams Don't Build Anything Anymore

This one is even older than the "ham radio is dying" myth, being bandied around at club meetings, on the air, and in the magazines' letters columns nearly since commercial ham gear first came on the market in the 1930s. You'll even find a reference to it in this very issue, early on in the "Digital Connection" column. Digital Editor N2IRZ writes, "In past columns, we've established that fewer hams are building things these days." Now I don't like to disagree with our own columnists in print, but I also don't believe in censoring them because I disagree with them. But I must disagree. Our "Kit-Building" column has been an instant hit, and last summer—because people were writing this in—we added "homebrewing/kit-building" to the interests section of our reader survey reply cards. So far, we've only gotten three months' worth of responses, but they've been very consistent at 27%, 28%, and 30%. That puts it smack in the middle of the interests we list on the card, just above digital (sorry, Don). At least among *CQ* readers, building in ham radio is alive and well.

So ... get on the air. Enjoy your hobby, and share the excitement. Make it your personal goal to help at least one new person get into ham radio (and get active) every year, and you can help protect our future.

73, W2VU