

I believe the code requirement still has a place in the amateur radio service. While not every amateur radio operator uses Morse Code, it still distinguishes the Amateur Radio Service from other services. The argument to remove the requirement is based on “No other service uses Morse Code.” The Amateur Radio Service is not like the other services.

Many individuals and organizations would like to see the Morse Code requirement abolished for all classes of US amateur licenses for various reasons. The most common arguments are that Morse Code is a stumbling block to obtaining a license, and administering Morse Code exams requires specialized equipment.

Morse Code is a stumbling block only if somebody allows it to be. One only needs to look at the Courage Handi-Ham system to prove that point. They have taken people with severe handicaps and helped those people become licensed. While some of those people may have received an exemption for the old 13 and 20 words per minute requirement to move beyond the Technician Class, they still had to pass the five words per minute requirement because the treaty required it.

Fifteen to twenty minutes a day for a few weeks is usually all someone needs to get to the point of passing the five words per minute exam. Finding that time can be tough given the busy schedules people have, but the time will be made if the individual really wants to earn a license that requires it. If they cannot find the time to learn Morse Code, they may not really be that interested in amateur radio.

The argument is made that removing the code requirement will allow the amateur radio population to grow, thus protecting valuable spectrum space. It may or may not. The reality is that allowing greater numbers of amateur radio operators access to the HF spectrum is not going to protect the most vulnerable spectrum. The wireless phone companies have an insatiable appetite for spectrum space in the UHF and higher frequencies. Rather than increase the numbers of General and higher class licenses, there needs to be more activity on the VHF and higher amateur bands. While the largest group of amateur radio operators in the US is Technicians licensed since 1991, when the code requirement was removed for the Technician Class license, many of them are not active. They may have decided operating on local repeaters 100 percent of the time is boring. But, they chose not to look beyond the local repeater.

Another common argument arises from administering the exam. Administering a Morse Code exam does not require any specialized equipment. The exam itself can be played on any ordinary tape player as

long as the volume and sound quality are sufficient for the situation. Preparing the exam can be done with a computer generating a file that can be put on tape or stored in a file to be played on another computer at the exam. Creating Morse Code exams at this point in time is probably easier now than when the Volunteer Exam program was started. I find it disturbing that some Volunteer Exam Coordinators believe the Morse Code exam is too hard to prepare given the technology available. They signed an agreement with the FCC to administer amateur radio exams, and if they feel overburdened, they should get out of the volunteer exam business.

While learning Morse Code does not make someone a better operator, it does show a level of commitment to the service. I agree there should be a way to encourage people to upgrade and continue in the Amateur Radio Service. Some access to HF may be a way to do that. By removing the requirement from the General Class, and retaining the requirement for the Extra Class, that level of commitment is still demonstrated to obtain the highest class of license, and HF access is available for those who want it without learning Morse Code.

While it is true the ITU removed the requirement, it did leave the final decision up to each country to decide for itself to continue the requirement. Some countries have already removed the requirement, some are discussing removal, but many continue to require Morse Code, probably because the US continues. Many of those countries may follow whatever direction the US takes, but that does not mean all will.

Based on that approach, if the FCC continues Morse Code as a requirement for the Amateur Extra Class license only, and many other countries take the US's lead, an amateur radio operator from the US can get the highest class reciprocal license privileges while traveling in another country. A foreign amateur with the highest class license that requires Morse Code would be granted Amateur Extra privileges while operating in the US. A foreign amateur with the highest class from a country that does not require Morse Code would be given General privileges. A General Class US amateur could be granted the highest class license in a country that does not require Morse Code, or an equivalent license in a country that does require Morse Code.

I believe this is the fairest approach to the Amateur Radio Service in the US and worldwide. Morse Code continues to remain a vital part of the Amateur Radio Service. Yes, the amateur population is getting smaller. But, simply adding to the numbers by eliminating a license requirement will not solve the problem. We need more active amateur radio operators.