

The subject of encryption of Amateur Radio signals is a complicated weaving of the desire to more fully and ably serve the community in times of emergency and the need to prevent the perversion of the Amateur Service to illicit uses.

While the proposal in RM-11699 raises a valid concern relating to the use of the Amateur Service in emergency situations, other concerns, equally valid, may arise from allowing the broader use of encrypted communications. These include, but are not limited to, the potential for such signals to be used for illegal or commercial means, and the inability for Amateur Radio Operators not part of an organized emergency response to communicate effectively with such an organized Amateur response.

Perhaps most importantly, the broader allowance for encrypted communications by could adversely affect the PERCEPTION of the Amateur Service. The decentralized nature of the Amateur Service is both one of its greatest strengths, by having no single failure point in the event of an emergency, and its greatest causes for suspicion on the part of those who are not regularly associated with the service and the dominant Amateur Practice. Allowing encrypted communications would provide further cause for suspicion by making the content of an already often little-understood service unknowable as well. This additional factor might increase efforts to limit or eliminate the Amateur Service both in the United States and abroad, an outcome which must be avoided if at all possible.

While the use of encrypted communications by the Amateur Service in certain emergency situations might be advisable, further discussion of method and authority must be had to develop at least a framework for the Good Amateur Practice of such before it is allowed into general use. As such, a greater effort needs to be made to include the greater Amateur community, as well as the emergency services Amateurs cooperate with, in the discussion and development of such practices and determine if they are necessary at all.

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