

ENCRYPTION IN HAM RADIO?

My opinion for full encryption useage in amateur radio is that it could be useful in certain situations. Medical records transfer is mentioned. In the amateur radio service, there is no transfer of business or personal information. FCC part 97 rules specifically prohibit business useage. This rule will have to be struck down, nullifying the amateur status and promoting it to commercial useage. Radio useage beomes a direct competitor with other services, such as cell phones, and internet linkage. Fees and billing will become part of the operations. Personal, friendly conversation will be the same as cell phones, with all special services like facebook, texting, and any standard service. Free international radio useage and personal interchange may disappear as a result.

If encrytion is limited, our service could remain private and personal, with no fees and billing, as it is now. I recommend here that only background links, such as bulletin boards, be encoded. We currently have many digital protocols in useage, and more are becoming available on a regular basis. Many of these are obscure. If secure information transfer during emergencies is needed, using methods such as teletype, packet, pactor, and even high speed cw can be used. Special encryption modes can be specified, for use during emergency useage, which are little used.

My opinion against encrytion is that amateur radio works fine as it is. Secure communications is rarely a factor during emergency message passing. Merely getting point to point messaging is the major effort. Secure links are a luxury rarely seen during emergencies. Hurricane Katrina is a fine example. Almost no commercial radio useage was available, as the trunking dispatch was flooded or out of commission, so field useage was also down. One amateur 'open frequency' radio repeater, on batteries, transmitting unencypted, provided emergency, first responder, Red Cross, and other vital communications. The repeater owner was later heard to say 'How can I help?' The response: "Your radio IS helping!" He was also cut off, even from his own equipment, as his home was under water. Encryption in this situation is definitely a bad idea, as special radios are required, plus the computers and computer links to run them. Point to point links are the key.

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