

ARRL Seeks Input on Initial VHF+ Contest Rule Changes

Dear fellow Amateurs,

The Programs & Services Committee of the ARRL Board recognizes the need to review and update various aspects of the League's contest program for our VHF and higher bands. To this end, it recently formed an Ad Hoc Subcommittee on VHF and Above Revitalization. You can help us by providing additional insights and ideas for our consideration.

Background

Contest participation benefits both individual Amateurs and the Amateur Radio Service as a whole. Individual operators gain overall operating experience, increase their knowledge of band characteristics; test the results of changes in equipment, antennas and locations; and have incentive to add bands and modes to their station complement, all in the context of enjoyable yet challenging activities. The Amateur Radio Service increases its pool of skilled operators and can show more intense usage of the frequencies allocated to us, some of which may be under threat from ever-expanding commercial and consumer services seeking to expand their share of spectrum. Increased activity also signals higher potential demand for new product to manufacturers of Amateur Radio equipment.

The ARRL VHF – UHF – Microwave contest program was created to help foster the foregoing benefits and, accordingly, seeks to:

- 1) Increase the level and breadth of participation in ARRL VHF and up contests; and
- 2) Encourage the utilization of our less-used Amateur Radio bands.

Initial Recommendation

While most issues will require additional time and input from the user community, the members of the Subcommittee were in agreement on recommending one set of changes that applies across all ARRL VHF+ contests, including microwave and EME. We recommend:

- 1) Removal of the current prohibition on the use of Amateur and non-Amateur forms of assistance for all operator categories, with such use having no impact on entry category;
- 2) Removal of the current prohibition on self-spotting for all operator categories; and
- 3) Allowing single operators to transmit on more than one band at a time.

Rationale

Unlike most HF contests, operating skill and knowledge of propagation may not be enough to find stations to work. You can't just point your antenna to Europe or Asia at the right time and

find a ready supply of potential contacts. The less predictable nature of VHF+ propagation and the necessarily higher-gain, narrow-beamwidth antennas used make finding someone to work largely a matter of chance. Indeed, most microwave contacts would never occur at all without the use of real-time coordination. We have stories of rovers who invest time and fuel to activate a remote location only to have no one find them or work them. This discourages such remote activations. A great number of non-contesters monitoring a repeater or APRS network have no idea there is a distant or rare station out there to try to work.

The League's current prohibitive stance on assistance (other than for the 10 GHz & Up Contest) and self-spotting is the most often heard complaint about our VHF contest program, and the members of the Subcommittee believe that removing those prohibitions will foster greater participation and result in more contacts and a more positive experience for participants without impacting the existing challenge of actually completing contacts.

Similarly, the present restriction of single-operator stations to one transmitted signal at a time precludes such activities as calling CQ on one band while soliciting or completing contacts using digital modes on another. Such restriction constrains the number of potential contacts among participants while yielding no apparent benefit.

Specific Proposed Rule Changes

The General Rules for All ARRL Contests Above 50 MHz shall be amended as follows:

Old 1.7. Retransmitting either or both stations, or use of repeater frequencies, is not permitted.

New 1.7. Retransmitting either or both stations or use of repeater frequencies for purposes of completing a contact is not permitted.

Old 1.7.1. This prohibits use of all repeater frequencies.

New: Delete 1.7.1. (Rule 1.7 covers this issue adequately.)

Old 1.7.2. Contest entrants may not transmit on repeaters or repeater frequencies for the purpose of soliciting contacts.

New: Delete Rule 1.7.2

Add 1.16. All entrants, regardless of category, are permitted to use spotting assistance or nets, including DX-alerting nets, internet chat rooms, packet, reverse beacon networks and repeaters to identify stations available for contacts and to announce (self-spot) their availability for contacts. Announcements shall be limited to callsign, location, band or frequency, mode and – if applicable – transmitting sequence. **Such assistance may not be used to facilitate the completion of any contact. This means such assistance may not be used to convey receipt or non-receipt of any required element of a contact or to request a repeat of any required element of a contact.**

Old 2.1. Single Operator: One person performs all transmitting, receiving, spotting, and logging functions as well as equipment and antenna adjustments. Only one transmitted signal

is permitted at any given time. Use of spotting assistance or nets (operating arrangements involving other individuals, DX-alerting nets, internet chat rooms, packet, etc) is not permitted.

New 2.1. Single Operator: One person performs all transmitting, receiving, spotting, and logging functions as well as equipment and antenna adjustments. Only one transmitted signal per band is permitted at any given time. Non-contact-producing activities such as APRS beaconing and repeater announcements are not considered transmitted signals for the purpose of applying this rule.

Old 2.5.7. Rovers are permitted to use APRS. Rovers using APRS transmit only their call sign and position. Any multi-op station may access rover APRS data directly or via the Internet.

New 2.5.7. Rovers are permitted to use APRS to transmit their call sign and position. Any station may access rover APRS data directly or via the Internet.

Old 2.8. Multioperator (includes Single Operator stations that use spotting assistance):

New 2.8. Multioperator:

Contest-specific rules for all VHF, UHF, microwave and EME contests shall be amended to give effect to the above general rules.

What We Need From You

You can help us by considering the potential impact of each proposal and sharing any specific observations about it. We're not tallying "votes"; rather, we want to be sure we have considered all foreseeable results of the proposed changes. Collective input from user groups will be particularly helpful and faster to compile than multiple copies of the same position from individual group members.

Further, this is not about changing "who wins" but about whether the overall objectives stated above will be better attained as a result of each proposed change. Overlying any enacted changes is the recognized need to increase outreach beyond the already-active VHF+ contesting community. Your suggestions in this regard will also be welcomed.

Please submit your comments to vhf-input@arri.org prior to December 15th, 2014. Only comments received through this channel will be assured of reaching all the members of the Subcommittee.

Thank you for helping us with this process.

73,

Kermit Carlson W9XA, Chair
Ad Hoc Subcommittee on VHF and Above Revitalization