

AROS –

The subject of repeater abuse

The Amateur Radio Observation Service is an advisory and reporting service of the RSGB that is intended to assist radio amateurs and others who may be affected by problems that occur within the amateur bands or that develop on other frequencies as a result of amateur transmissions.



AROS has a team of over 100 observers who can be tasked with specific monitoring activities.

AROS investigates reports of licence infringements, or instances of poor operating practice that might bring the Amateur Service into disrepute. Reports, complaints and associated supplementary information are accepted from any source and the contents of each communication are regarded as confidential material. AROS has a team of over 100 observers who can be tasked with specific monitoring activities and these volunteers help collate supporting information in cases that are passed to Ofcom.

AROS works closely with the RSGB's Emerging Technology Coordination Committee (ETCC) that has responsibility for the licensing of the repeater network and is formally recognised by Ofcom as the preferred interface from the amateur community. The RSGB AROS Coordinator is responsible for the monitoring activities of the AROS Observers across the country and managing the interface with Ofcom for which a formal process has been defined and agreed between all parties. This process clearly defines the scope of activities and interfaces between AROS and Ofcom.

Repeater abuse

Repeater abuse appears to be a long-standing problem within the UK network. When I was a young G1 in the 1980s, my local repeater was renowned for persistent and ongoing problems. My experience with AROS over the last few years shows that the abusers generally fall into one of three broad categories:

- 1 The inter amateur personal feud; a falling-out at a local club or other issues leads to abuse targeted at an individual or individuals
- 2 The alcohol- or other substance-fuelled abuser; often random anger and general ranting takes place
- 3 The dedicated abuser determined to wreak havoc wherever they can.

Individual abusers who fall into category 1 or 2 can often be quickly identified as they do little to hide their identity; often they will use their callsigns as they see no fault in their conduct. This kind of abuse is usually short lived and tends to disappear as quickly as it starts.

Individuals in category 3 are more concerning and probably need professional help; they are more often than not very intelligent individuals who lack social acceptance and have become anti-establishment. We often find they also have very strong legal knowledge. They tend to get as much pleasure out of using the legal system to their advantage as they do out of the act of abuse they are undertaking. Their acts of abuse are their 'safe place' and they are as good at defending it as they are acting within it.

Individuals in this category feed off any response to their behaviour; discussing the abuse on the air or in any form of social media in the public domain is exactly what they are looking for. Ignoring the abuse completely often disarms the individual and may, on a very good day, even lead to self-reflection.

AROS has always strongly advised against any form of recognition of this kind of behaviour as it always fuels the situation and never helps.

In a recent legal case, an abuser successfully argued as his defence that individuals responding to his behaviour were antagonising and enticing his actions. It is therefore *imperative* that we do not respond to on-air abuse in any way whatsoever; including off-air discussions on social media.

It is also worthy of note that bringing prosecution against individuals of this nature can be very costly and recent examples have led to magistrates handing down very disproportionate penalties when compared to the cost of the action itself.

There will be a number of technological changes in the new year that will improve the possibility of monitoring in a more agile fashion. We are currently collating information in a number of persistent abuse cases and hope for successful resolution in due course; we will work with Ofcom as necessary on these.

It is important to emphasise that the onus is on the repeater keeper, as the repeater NoV holder, to manage the traffic being carried and to deal with issues at a local level wherever possible. Ofcom will expect the repeater keeper to have tried a number of actions prior to any formal investigation being started, these may include, but are not limited to:

- Ensuring any regular users are informed of the need to ignore the problem completely;
- Implementing a 'cooling off period' whereby the repeater is switched off for a prolonged period – this would typically be 2-3 weeks;
- Adding time controls on the repeater and only making the service available at peak times;
- Nulling antenna patterns in the direction of problematic transmissions;
- Use of digital technology to remove access to specific individuals;
- Anything else relevant in the individual circumstance.

Whilst the above suggestions may be seen as onerous and not immediately in the interests of genuine repeater users, it is the approach that Ofcom will recognise as a serious attempt to address the situation.

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