

Why Isn't Safety First?

By Alan R. Applegate, KØBG

The ARRL has always stressed safety to its members and for good reason. The average amateur works around high voltage ac and dc circuits, fairly substantial RF voltages, climbs to towering heights (no pun intended), and works with hot soldering irons. Without due caution, an amateur risks electrocution, RF exposure, debilitating falls, severe burns and possible death. Just this past year, two well-known amateurs were killed while pursuing amateur-related activities. The real toll is difficult to assess, as specific amateur-related injuries are not cataloged by any federal agency. This includes the NHTSA (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, www.nhtsa.gov).

I mention the NHTSA because a trend toward amateur mobile operation is increasing by all accounts. And the majority of this operating is done while in motion. Whether or not these mobile operations (called *telematics* by the NHTSA) are causing accidents is far from moot. While only two states require listing of telematics use on accident reports, a growing number of cities and counties are requiring the data, and the preliminary results are alarming. Unfortunately, these early reports do not specifically list two-way or Amateur Radio use. Nonetheless, our city fathers and mothers are listening and responding by passing laws against all matter of telematics use, including Amateur Radio. We have several instances of this here in my home state of New Mexico.

In a letter presented to the NHTSA, Mrs Joyce White, a registered nurse, presented a case that is very much related. (The letter can be found at www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/PDF/nrd-13/WhiteJ_doc.pdf.) Here is an excerpt.

I came to Washington today, as a concerned citizen, to share my views on driver distraction and telematics in hopes that you will walk away with a deeper understanding of the problem and what you can do to help.

I have a personal interest in this issue because almost three years ago my 21-year-old daughter, Angela, along with one of her friends, was killed in a crash in which the driver of the other vehicle was using a cell phone. This driver was unaware that she was speeding and did not see the car in which my daughter was a pas-

senger prepare to make a turn, both classic examples of driver distraction.

While this example deals with cell phone use, it could have been Amateur Radio. As a personal example, in 1975 I received a speeding ticket in Arizona, and I openly admit it was a lack of attention caused by talking on my Amateur Radio.

Of late there seems to be another trend that is less evident: The lack of safe operating conditions while mobile. With some 30-plus years of mobile operation, I have never temporarily mounted a piece of amateur gear in any vehicle I have operated from. When it comes to safe operating and safe operating conditions, the phrase "throw the rig in the car" has no merit.

Last year while attending a hamfest, I overheard a conversation between two amateurs, one of whom was discussing his recent HF mobile installation. Curious, I just had to look to see why he was so proud of his handy work. Well, he had used Velcro to attach the face plate of his ICOM IC-706 right in the center of his steering wheel, and on top of the SRS (supplemental restraint system). Yes it was convenient, but potentially very deadly!

It is distracting enough to talk on Amateur Radio and drive without adding further distraction caused by poor installation practices. While the above example is an extreme case, it is by no means unique. In its "Up Front In *QST*" column, the ARRL recently published a picture of a mobile installation that used Velcro as an attachment method. In the case of an accident, Velcro and bungee cords allow rigs to become airborne missiles. And the same can be said for mag-mount mobile antennas.

Every state in the union has passed laws that specifically address such safety concerns as child safety seats and seat belt use. All of these devices must meet specific NHTSA standards. Hundreds of drivers have been stopped and ticketed for not meeting the requirements of the law. But I'll bet not one single amateur has ever been ticketed for a sloppy installation.

In the absence of laws requiring proper installations, it is up to us amateurs to set a safe operating environment level, as free of distraction as possible, and ones that

will ensure that we remain out of the public limelight with respect to safety. Let's all work toward ensuring our continued use of our favorite form of telematics.

QST Op-Ed Policy

The purpose of Op-Ed is to air member viewpoints that may or may not be consistent with current ARRL policy.

1) Contributions may be up to two-thirds of a *QST* page in length (approximately 900 words).

2) No payment will be made to contributors.


3) Any factual assertions must be supported by references, which do not necessarily have to be included in the body of the article to be published.

4) Articles containing statements that could be construed as libel or slander will not be accepted.

5) The subject matter chosen must be of general interest to radio amateurs, and must be discussed in a way that will be understandable to a significant portion of the membership.

6) With the exception that the article need not be consistent with League policy, the article will be subject to the usual editorial review prior to acceptance.

7) No guarantee can be made that an accepted article will be published by a certain date, or indeed, that it will be published at all; however, only articles that we intend to publish will be accepted, and any article we have decided against publishing will be returned promptly.

8) Send your contributions to ARRL Op-Ed, 225 Main St, Newington, CT 06111. 

STRAYS

QST congratulates...

◇ Gregg Hendry, W8DUQ, an ARRL Life Member from Barboursville, West Virginia, who has been selected as an Operations Supervisor at the Huntington Tri-State Airport Air Traffic Control Tower, Huntington, West Virginia. Gregg has also been appointed Cabell County Assistant Emergency Coordinator for the Skywarn program.

