

Second Century



A Focus on Technicians

As we end this Year of the Volunteers, how do we carry the notion of reaching one rung higher into 2024? The answer lies within the numbers: the demographics of amateur radio. One of the consequences of the no-code Technician license was the ability to dramatically grow our ranks through what became a somewhat easier path to getting licensed. And there's no question that our ranks of amateur licensees in the US have been growing slowly but steadily.

However, we know there's something wrong once we link the overall growth of licensees, a licensing system that can take as long as 12 years to correct itself once someone — for one reason or another — is no longer active in amateur radio, and the extremely low ARRL membership numbers for Technician licensees. There are simply too many people who dedicate the time to become licensed and then leave, in some cases having never made a single contact.

Here's where you, in one of so many ways, can carry the torch into next year: become an advocate for mentoring Technicians and getting them radio active.

The most obvious place to start is with your local radio club. I have heard from some club leaders around the country who have written or spoken passionately about how they link their licensing classes to getting active within the club, and even growing their club. Some have gone so far as to ensure that young people getting their licenses are provided at no charge with a 2-meter handheld, preprogrammed with the club's repeater. They assign a mentor from within the club to help that new licensee pursue the aspect of amateur radio that attracted them in the first place. Other clubs use programs such as Kit Night or Tech Night, where club members come together to build or fix something as a platform for training new Technicians and getting them on the air.

There's a great opportunity, right now, to inspire Technicians, new or not, to utilize all of their privileges. And this opportunity comes to us compliments of Solar Cycle 25. Just 5 years ago, 10 meters was lackluster at best. Looking at the scores of contesters around the world, 10 meters played a very small role in their overall performance due to a lack of favorable propagation. Today we've gone from lackluster to gangbusters! There's so much that you can do to engage with Technicians and help them get active to leverage these outstanding conditions.

One area that we hams love to experiment with, probably more than any other, is antennas. Ten meters, as the physically smallest of the HF bands, provides a wide range of possibilities you can work with to nurture a prospective HF operator. At ARRL, we've been promoting an end-fed half-wave antenna kit for a few years now because it is simple to build, easy to deploy as a portable or fixed antenna, and can work on 40 meters through 10 meters when carefully tuned. For a Technician, this antenna only requires 16 feet of wire!

And with a feed line-based counterpoise, it is extremely simple to install.

During the January 2023 ARRL Board meeting, a motion was introduced and passed to focus our efforts on opportunities to get more Technicians active and on the air. While increasing content and training will be part of the approach, we've also been working with antenna manufacturers to partner with us on antennas that Technicians can easily deploy to get on 10 meters and 6 meters. One antenna we've been enamored with is the 10-meter Moxon beam. My brother Jeremy, KE0BPY, put up a chimney-mounted Moxon during Cycle 24 and worked the world with just 100 watts. We've wondered how a 10-meter Moxon and a two- or three-element 6-meter Yagi might coexist on the same boom — and we like what we see! Look for us to bring that as another platform to help you get Technicians on the air!

While many Technicians default to running to VHF FM as the principal place to start, other modes like FT8 offer an opportunity to expand their experiences and bring them into the digital data realm. FT8 activity on 6 meters has greatly increased with a near-persistent presence of stations from May – August looking for openings to grow their VUCC and DXCC standings. And don't forget CW. Despite having no-code licensing, a renaissance in CW is upon us. There is a growing list of places and sources to learn Morse code, and Technicians have their share of bands to choose from to get on the air and make contacts.

The key message is: we have a wide audience of people already licensed within amateur radio who we are missing. And who are missing out. Whether with your club or individually, now is the time to reach one rung higher. Become one of those mentors, like N2MW, W5OV, and KR2Q were for me as a Novice. Get new licensees radio active. Be that connector who gets them into your club and who can provide that next generation of leadership. And round them up for the ARRL 10-Meter and DX contests coming up, which is where we'll be looking for them! And *you!*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David A. Minster', with 'NA2AA' written in a smaller font to the right.

David A. Minster, NA2AA
Chief Executive Officer