

Phone Patch Guidelines

Phone Patch, Autopatch and HF/VHF/UHF Operating Guidelines

Radio amateurs in the US enjoy a great privilege: The ability to interconnect their stations and repeaters with the public telephone system. The wisdom of the federal government in permitting, and even in defending, this freedom has been demonstrated time and again. There is no way to calculate the value of the lives and property that have been saved by the intelligent use of phone patch and autopatch facilities in emergency situations. The public interest has been well served by amateurs with interconnect capabilities.

Repeaters, which operate duplex, that is, they receive on one input frequency and transmit *simultaneously* on the output frequency, use designated offsets. The ARRL suggested standard repeater offsets are:

29 MHz 100 kHz

52 MHz VARIOUS

144MHz 600 kHz

222 MHz 1.6 MHz

440 MHz 5 MHz

902 MHz 12 MHz

1240 MHz 12 MHz

Local and regional bandplans supersede the national recommendations.

As with any privilege, this one can be abused, and the penalty for abuse could be the loss of the privilege for all amateurs. What constitutes abuse of phone patch and autopatch privileges? In the absence of specific regulations governing their use, the answer to this question depends on one's perspective. Consider these facts: To other amateurs, phone patching activities that result in unnecessary frequency congestion or which appear as a commercialization of Amateur Radio operation are an abuse of their privilege to engage in other forms of amateur activities.

To the telephone company, which needs to protect its massive investment in capital equipment, anything that endangers its equipment, its personnel or its revenues is an abuse.

To the Federal Communications Commission, which is responsible for the efficient use of the radio spectrum by the services it regulates, any radiocommunication that could be handled more appropriately by wire is an unnecessary use of a valuable resource.

To the commercial suppliers of radiocommunication for business purposes (Radio Common Carriers), competition from a noncommercial service constitutes a possible threat to their livelihood.

At one time or another, threats to radio amateurs' interconnect privileges have come from each of these sources. And threats may come from another quarter: The governments of certain nations that prohibit amateurs from handling third-party messages internationally in competition with government-owned telecommunications services. If illegal phone patching to and from their countries cannot be controlled, they reason, the solution may be to ban all international third-party traffic by amateurs and to permit no such special arrangements.

The question facing amateurs is this: Should phone patches and autopatches be subject to reasonable voluntary restraints, thereby preserving most of our traditional flexibility, or should we risk forcing our government to define for us specifically what we can and cannot do? Experience has clearly shown that when specific regulations are established, innovation and flexibility are likely to suffer.

The Amateur Radio Service is not a common carrier, and its primary purpose is not the handling of routine messages on behalf of nonamateurs. **Third-party communications as an incidental part of Amateur Radio, however, adds an important dimension to amateur public-service capability.**

It is the policy of the American Radio Relay League to safeguard the prerogative of amateurs to interconnect their stations, including repeaters, to the public telephone system. An important element of this defense is encouraging amateurs to maintain a high standard of legal and ethical conduct in their patching activities. It is to this end that these guidelines are addressed. They are based on standards that have been in use for several years on a local or regional basis throughout the country. The ideas they represent have widespread support within the amateur community. All amateurs are urged to observe these standards carefully so amateurs' traditional freedom from government regulation may be preserved as much as possible:

1) International phone patches may be conducted only when there is a special third-party agreement between the countries concerned. The only exceptions are when the immediate safety of life or property is endangered, or where the third party is a licensed amateur.

2) **Phone patches or autopatches involving the pecuniary interest of the originator, or on behalf of the originator's employer, must not be conducted at any time. The content of any patch should be such that it is clear to any listener that such communications are not involved. Particular caution must be observed in calling any business telephone. Calls to place an order for a commercial product may be made such as the proverbial call to the pizza restaurant to order food, but not calls to one's office to receive or to leave business messages since communications on behalf of one's employer are not permitted. Calls made in the interests of highway safety, however, such as for the removal of injured persons from the scene of an accident or for the removal of a disabled vehicle from a hazardous location, are permitted.**

3) All interconnections must be made in accordance with telephone company tariffs. This means that your equipment must not affect the proper functioning of the telephone system; if it does, you are responsible for correcting the problem. If you have trouble obtaining information about the tariffs from your telephone company, they are available for public inspection at the telephone company office.

4) Phone patches and autopatches should never be made solely to avoid telephone toll charges. Phone patches and autopatches should never be made when normal telephone service could just as easily be used.

- 5) Third parties should not be retransmitted until the responsible control operator has explained the nature of Amateur Radio to them. Control of the station must never be relinquished to an unlicensed person. Permitting a person you don't know very well to conduct a patch in a language you don't understand amounts to relinquishing control.
- 6) Make sure the third parties know they are participating in radio communications, and that such communications are not private, and may be heard by people other than the parties involved.
- 7) Phone patches and autopatches must be terminated immediately in the event of any illegality or impropriety.
- 8) Autopatch facilities must not be used for broadcasting. If a repeater can transmit information of general interest, such as weather reports, such transmissions must occur only when requested by a licensed amateur and must not conform to a specific time schedule. The retransmission of radio signals from other services except for NOAA weather, government propagation bulletins and space shuttle communications, is not permitted in the Amateur Radio service.
- 9) Station identification must be strictly observed. In particular, US stations conducting international phone patches must identify in English at least once every 10 minutes, and must give their call signs and the other stations' call signs at the end of the communication.
- 10) In selecting frequencies for phone patch work, the rights of other amateurs must be considered. In particular, patching on 20 meters should be confined to the following frequency segments in accordance with the IARU Region 2 recommendation: 21.300-21.450 MHz and 14.250-14.350 MHz.
- 11) Phone patches and autopatches should be kept as brief as possible, as a courtesy to other amateurs; the amateur bands are intended to be used primarily for communication among radio amateurs.
- 12) If you have any doubt as to the legality or advisability of a patch, don't make it.

Compliance with these guidelines will help ensure that hams' interconnection privilege will continue to be available in the future, which will in turn help amateurs contribute to the public interest.

Reverse Autopatch

No unlicensed person may initiate an amateur transmission without the knowledge and approval of the station's control operator. Incoming calls to an autopatch must be answered and screened off the air by the control operator to ensure rule compliance. If an incoming call automatically causes the repeater to transmit, even if it's just a signal tone or notification message, then it is possible for an unlicensed person to initiate a transmission without the control operator's knowledge or approval, which is not permitted. The use of a reverse autopatch is permitted only under very limited conditions. This is not to restrict the Amateur Service unduly, but to protect the character of the service.

The Simplex Autopatch

A simplex autopatch operates very much like a repeater autopatch, except the station it is attached to is not a repeater. The station is operating on a simplex frequency and does not automatically retransmit the signals of other amateur stations. The main use for a "simpatch" is to provide a mobile user with the same functionality as a repeater patch from his home station.

The most important point to remember is that a control operator must be present at both stations' control points

[97.105(a)]. The operation involves third-party traffic in that a third party is "participating" in amateur radiocommunication. This "participation" is permitted as long as each station involved has a control operator monitoring and supervising the radiocommunication continuously to ensure compliance with the rules [97.115(b)]; automatic control is not permitted [97.109(e)]. There is no problem if a control operator is present at the fixed station location. If, however, the mobile user wishes to act as the control operator of the fixed station, then a radio link must be used to remotely control the fixed station, and that link is an auxiliary station [97.213(a)]. The link therefore must be on frequencies permitted for auxiliary station operation [97.201(d)]. A simplex autopatch, if controlled by radio link, may only be controlled via an auxiliary station on the 2 m and shorter wavelength bands (except the 144.0-144.5 MHz, 145.8-146.0 MHz, 219-220 MHz, 222.00-222.15 MHz, 431-433 MHz, and 435-438 MHz segments).

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