

Acknowledgment of Limited Antenna Use in ARRL Contest Results

Contest Rules Proposal

Since antennas are a critical factor in contest performance and are not currently tracked, the PSC and CAC are asked to review the desirability of including an acknowledgment (e.g., notation, overlay, category) in the Results when a limited antenna(s) was used by a contestant. Such an acknowledgment has the potential to enhance equity and growth in contesting.

Discussion

Many hams operate only with limited antennas, often owing to factors beyond their control. Factors include: HOA restrictions, condos and apartments are less amenable to beams, family and neighbor acceptance, limited personal finances, limited physical mobility and ability, safety concerns, renting the home, or maintenance burden. Such operators often work hard to overcome this differential by developing strong operating skills, but physics usually beats skill. This group of operators has a competitive disadvantage compared to operators with beams on towers, yet all the results are listed together without differentiation. It is fair to estimate that at least half of hams use limited antennas. *The antenna* is a key factor of signal strength, which is correlated to contest productivity.

Contest rules already categorize results by factors that cause differential competitive advantages, including power, assistance, mode, number of operators, number of bands, geographic location, remote, operating time, and age. The tradition and value of acknowledging competitive differences are recognized. Antennas have already received attention in some contests, such as TBW in CQ contests.

If a limited antenna acknowledgement is implemented, it should in no way diminish the opportunities and accomplishments of hams that have sacrificed and built large antennas for improved competitiveness. It is desirable for the rules to consider all contestants.

Defining a Limited Antenna

A limited antenna may be defined as having a single element (e.g., dipole, doublet, vertical, loop, inverted L, long wire, end-fed wire, commercial mobile, flagpole, gutter), or being an indoor antenna. It should not include rhombic or phased verticals.

Potential Benefits of Acknowledging Limited Antenna Use

Equity

A few testers do very well with limited antennas. However, this achievement is not readily recognized. Many other hams are maxed out with limited antennas and will forever rank in Results as mediocre. They deserve to be compared apples-to-apples. The common goal is to improve operating performance, not just to build a bigger antenna. Furthermore, acknowledgment gives a benchmark by which station performance can be compared.

Growth of Participation

An acknowledgment for limited antenna use would stimulate contesting growth. It would give hams a reason to feel good about their results and, thus, a motivation to continue participating. It would avert discouragement, from always coming in low in results, which can lead to quitting. It would show potential testers that their accomplishments will be recognized and not seen as poor or mediocre. Growth would benefit all contestants because there would be more QSOs overall. The common encouragements to do better than last year, do better than your buddy, improve skills, or find an obscure smaller category, become less motivating over time without actual acknowledgment.

Acknowledgment Mechanism

The acknowledgment could be as simple as a notation in the Results (e.g., asterisk) and need not involve an associated award. Stronger acknowledgment such as an overlay might be considered..

Acknowledgments in the Results should not diminish: a) the contesting opportunities and achievements of veteran contesters who have sacrificed to build larger antennas, nor b) the ability to be listed in the results with other relevant categories (e.g., power). It should not be seen as an “everybody gets a plaque” or proliferation of categories situation, and contesting should remain a competitive sport.