

Why We Are Recommending Enhanced HF Privileges for Technician Licensees

ARRL has asked the FCC to expand HF privileges for Technician licensees to include limited phone privileges on 75, 40, and 15 meters, plus RTTY and digital mode privileges on 80, 40, and 15 meters. These recommendations were put forth by the ARRL Board of Directors' Entry-Level License Committee (ELL), which explored various initiatives and gauged members' opinions through surveys conducted in 2016 and 2017.

Specifically, ARRL proposes to provide Technician licensees, present and future, with phone privileges at 3.900 to 4.000 MHz, 7.225 to 7.300 MHz, and 21.350 to 21.450 MHz, plus RTTY and digital privileges in current Technician CW allocations on 80, 40, and 15 meters. The ARRL petition is in recognition of the tremendous technological advances and changes in Amateur Radio.

“This action will enhance the available license operating privileges in what has become the principal entry-level license class in the Amateur Service,” ARRL said in the petition. “It will attract more newcomers to Amateur Radio, it will result in increased retention of licensees who hold Technician class licenses, and it will provide an improved incentive for entry-level licensees to increase technical self-training and pursue higher license class achievement and development of communications skills.”

We encourage everyone to read the full petition, which can be found at www.arrl.org/TechnicianEnhancement

Key Points:

- A thorough review of operating privileges available to the entry-level license has not occurred since the late 1970s when the Novice class license — the entry-level license at that time — was modified to allow Novices access to a limited portion of the 10-meter band, which included the first HF phone privileges for that license class.
- The 2-year process that led to the development of this petition did include significant input from the Amateur Radio community. The two surveys that the ELL Committee conducted on this issue drew more than 8,000 responses from ARRL members.
- If the operating privileges are changed as proposed, the Technician class license, (which is now the entry-level license class since the FCC prohibited the issuance of new Novice class licenses in 2000) will be comparable to the “foundation” license found in many Amateur Radio administrations around the world. These foundation licenses include a broad array of basic HF phone, CW, and digital privileges in addition to the VHF/UHF privileges already available with the current Technician class license.
- Technician licensees, now numbering at about 378,000, comprise more than half of the US Amateur Radio population. Yet, the Technician class license is insufficient for the purpose that the FCC made for it 18 years ago. Many who obtain Technician class licenses do not participate actively, do not pursue on-air and public service opportunities,

do not renew their licenses prior to expiration, and do not pursue higher license classes. There is an uncomfortably large attrition rate among Technician class licensees. Those who obtain Technician-class licenses are not pursuing upgrades to General class licenses because they don't find the operating privileges offered by the Technician class license interesting enough to keep them from pursuing other, non-radio-related activities.

- The proposed addition of a total of 275 kHz of HF phone privileges, spread across the 80, 40, and 15-meter bands would allow Technicians the opportunity to develop and expand their understanding of HF propagation. In addition, this proposed change would allow Technician licensees to participate in public service-oriented, emergency, and Section traffic nets on 75-meter phone frequencies from 3900 to 4000 kHz, since 47 out of 50 states conduct their primary state/section-wide public service activities on those frequencies.
- Technician licensees already hold CW privileges on the frequencies on the 80, 40, and 15-meter bands where the proposal would add HF digital privileges. Those digital privileges will attract younger people to Amateur Radio.
- There is no proposed change to the 200 W Technician HF power limit. Also, the few remaining Novice licensees would gain no new privileges.
- While some believe that the addition of the frequencies takes away the Technician's incentive to upgrade, consider that current Technician HF privileges involve 850 kHz on 4 bands, with the proposed addition of 275 kHz on 3 of those bands, so the total under this proposal is 1125 on 4 bands – 80, 40, 15, and 10 meters. Compare that to General class HF privileges: 3150 kHz across 9 HF bands – 160, 80, 40, 30, 20, 17, 15, 12, and 10 meters. In addition, Generals have access to the 5-channels on 60-meters, and the two newest bands 2200 and 630 meters. The incentive to upgrade from Technician to General is almost tripling the available HF spectrum and allows those who upgrade access to 8 additional bands, including the prime day-time bands of 20 and 17-meters. Also, when a Technician upgrades to General or higher, they also are permitted the maximum Amateur power level of 1500 W.
- Demographic and technological changes call for a “periodic rebalancing,” and there has not been such a rebalancing in many years. The FCC has not assessed entry-level operating privileges since 2005, and yet Amateur Radio has changed dramatically since then, with many more modes of communication having been developed.
- ARRL does not propose changes to the Technician class question pool, which is reviewed and updated every 4 years by the NCVETC's Question Pool Committee. The current pool already tests for all of the basic technical and operating information that would allow Technician-class licensees to safely and appropriately use the proposed additional spectrum.