

Response to Inquiry About Training/Radio Use

From: Jim Aspinwall no1pc@yahoo.com on Apr 9 at 8:23 PM
To Duenas, Tomasa
CC: Norm Lucas, Glen Pitts

Thank you for asking.

Amateur radio operators are taught, and then must take and pass a Federal Communications Commission test, on appropriate radio technology and radio operation to receive a license to operate.

Most amateur radio operators become affiliated with clubs or public service entities where they are further mentored in proper radio operation, especially in the course of working with NGOs and served agencies – Red Cross, search and rescue, sheriff or state communications reserves, etc. Much of their practice and the method or behavior of operation carries over to CB/recreational, and commercial two-way radio users.

In the course of learning and practice vehicle safety is always first. There is no personal urgency to put radio contact above vehicle operation.

For what it's worth, "radio operation" is not taught in EVOC - Emergency Vehicle Operation training for public safety personnel. Law enforcement, fire/rescue, EMS, etc. are trained in radio *protocol* - what 'language' and cadence to use between units and dispatchers – there is nothing specifically in the genre of "safe radio use while driving."

There is no distinction that those of us who are or have been in the employ/service of public safety agencies in clearly marked "Code 3" vehicles – are somehow safer radio users in an official vehicle, and become not-safer radio users when we exit those official 'marked' vehicles to private vehicles.

Radio Use - Behavior/Activity

There are critical differences in behavior between generic/autonomous "two-way radio use" of any kind, in any capacity, and the known more complex, involved risky behaviors, gestures and statistics of cell phone calls and TXTing, etc.

The nature of the two-way radio communications process, regardless of subject matter, is called "push-to-talk" - of which we typically spend >90% of the time listening to others, at which point handling the microphone in-hand is unnecessary - the other talker's audio comes from a dash/radio mounted speaker, much like built-in hands-free systems. We don't have to hold anything to our face, ear, etc. It is not nearly as interactive, involved as are phone calls/TXT.

For the <10% of time talking while 'mobile', the microphone is tethered and retractable, such that if necessary it is very easy, expected, and obvious to "drop the mike" - either replacing it on a hangar/bracket or laid in the lap. The activity is non-visual "muscle memory" - like operating a shifter or turn signals. We don't have to look at the radio or operate its controls. Eyes are on the road just as much as when listening.

If we have to "drop the mike", there is no sense of panic, loss, spill, etc. We don't lose anything under our feet, or have anything in conflict with vehicle controls. If we have to stop transmitting for exigent cause (traffic, braking, defensive situation) we simply do. Those "at the other end" engaged in conversation listening to us typically understand and allow for such things. We don't feel compelled to explain to the others what happened vs safe driving.

A microphone is a simple device, mounted in an operator-known/familiar position. We can grasp it from its 'hook', and replace it, without visual distraction... unlike figuring out which 'icon' to tap on a cell phone.

Put another way, use of a two-way radio of any kind or purpose is not a "phone call", it is a self-disciplined back-and-forth exchange of verbal information in "your turn to speak" fashion.

As a matter of course, many of us are involved in some form of public service, or public safety activity. As such, there is a primary element of safety-first presented to all participants. At the State/CalOES volunteer level we have all been required to take defensive driver training. CalOES, CalFire, CHP and hundreds of other agencies/entities utilize 2-way radio operations, by volunteers, in marked vehicles or other - without incident.

A most-significant take-away is that in over 70 years of mobile two-way radio operation, from the amateur radio operators who pioneered and were first allowed this in 1948, to the later introduction of two-way radio to police and fire entities, then business, then CB/recreational user, there are no statistics, evidence, legal or other findings that the 'activity' is a risk.

This from not only the current 740,000 licensed amateur radio operators in the U.S., but the many more CB radio users, business fleets, public works, public transportation, school bus entities, etc. School buses are required to have and use two-way radio, and typically prohibit cell-phone use of any kind. Barring two-way radio use deprives the public, business, public services, of critical communications that is often not available or otherwise prohibited.

There is no specific "radio safety" distinction between being a hobby/enthusiast, employed person, or critical public safety servant... neither avocation nor occupation clearly delineate risk or non-risk.

Perhaps by the fact that many people are unfamiliar with the radio-activity of thousands (millions?) of people, one can derive that it is obviously not something that has any significant attention, nor should be prohibited.

There are resources, affiliated or not with the nation's largest radio affinity group who are more than willing and able to demonstrate the non-risk simplicity of this activity. We are confident anyone could appreciate that two-way radio use is a non-risk activity compared to the cell/TXT consumer issues at hand.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to contribute, and please feel free to reach out with further questions and any interest in a live demonstration.