

How to Interact With a Concerned Neighbor

After reading this chapter you will have some insight into how amateur radio can be conducted in a scientifically verifiable, safe manner. The same is not true of your neighbor. After reading about the shocking, and, mostly untrue, hazards of RF exposure on the internet your neighbor may take a look at your antennas and worry. How you handle such fears could make practicing your hobby much more pleasant.

It's important to realize that simply reciting the many reasons that your neighbor has nothing to fear from your station is unlikely to be enough. You have a lot of things working in your favor: safety standards that are based on over 70 years of scientific research are incorporated into the FCC exposure regulations. You are required to comply with these standards to ensure your neighbor is not exposed to more RF energy than has been shown to be safe. Experience with cellular telephones, which the majority of people in the world use every day, has not shown any association with diseases. Amateur radio has been active for over 100 years and studies

of radio amateurs likewise have not shown association with diseases.

All these facts may not be convincing to your neighbor. As described in his book, *Responding to Community Outrage*¹, Peter Sandman describes the outrage that community members feel and how they respond to perceived hazards. First, you should try to determine if the real concern is about RF safety. Perhaps your neighbor never liked the look of your antenna but was powerless to do anything about it and chose to use RF safety as a way to attack it. Or, does your neighbor have a real concern about safety based on untruths found online? Talking to your neighbor in a nonthreatening way may reveal the true reason. Their powerlessness to do anything about your antenna may only increase their outrage about it.

Sandman points out that outraged people don't want to be talked down to. Burying them in facts will not convince them, it may even serve to polarize them further on the issue. Anyone who is afraid of RF energy will not believe that your facts are any truer than the

ones they found on the Internet. After all, you are biased; in their eyes, you have something to gain by convincing them that your transmissions are not dangerous. Often it is not clear what the motivation is of the anti-RF websites.

It is more effective to get your neighbors to relate to you. If they fear your station, that fear is real and they would not accept any attempt to make their fear seem unreasonable. Rather, you can agree with them that RF energy can be harmful, but you know enough about it to use it safely. You have been trained in the safe use of RF, and federal law requires that you operate your station safely. You can also remind them that you and your own family are exposed to the same RF energy and you would never do something to cause them harm.

References

1. Sandman, P., *Responding to Community Outrage: Strategies for Effective Risk Communication* (American Industrial Hygiene Association, 2012). Available free for personal use at <http://psandman.com/media/RespondingtoCommunityOutrage.pdf>.