



Modern Pile-Ups

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The problem of chaotic DX pile-ups is getting so bad that folks are finally paying attention. Ten years ago it was a minor issue but the problem has veritably exploded in just recent years. It's growing like wild-fire especially in Europe, but now also in other areas. The disease used to afflict only occasional DXpeditions, now it is normal and damages every DXpedition to some degree. All we tend to hear in pile-ups is a mix of unnecessary QRM but the sources are varied. So here's an attempt to summarise these different causative factors as we now understand them.

Circumstances

There are several dynamics which seem to determine the extent of unruly behaviour:

- rarity: the more rare the DX station the more excitement is generated and the more QRM is attracted.

- DX pile-up operator tactics: the tried & tested operating methods to best manage pile-ups are frequently not followed by DXpedition operators. These tactics ought to be self-evident but are often ignored - then chaos can ensue. Infrequently identifying is one: the call-sign needs to be sent often, let's say at least once per minute. In the heat of battle whilst he struggles to make QSOs the less experienced pile-up operator may be forgiven for simply forgetting to do this. He gets into the habit of only sending it every few QSOs or so, but then let's it slip. The easiest solution is to send it after every QSO, to avoid this trap. The very first time that he hears "call?" should be like a big warning flag. For the experienced pile-up operator who intentionally does not give his call-sign for long periods there is absolutely no excuse. Band pollution is another: the band may become filled with callers directly as a result of DXpedition operator tactics, when he takes callers from a wide range of frequencies - astute callers pick up on this and the pile-up spread quickly widens. To keep the pile-up within a small frequency range requires DX operator skill to be able to pick out call-signs from QRM - but some operators seem to need a clear frequency to do so.

Maybe they need more practice at home with computer simulator programs before diving in at the deep end. This is not a skill which can just be taken for granted, without which it may lead to working only the loudest signal. It also requires a good receiver so that signals are separated, perhaps with the help of attenuation if signals are too loud for the front end. This could be a long list: not adhering to his own instructions ("JA only", then working a UA3) is guaranteed to create immediate chaos. Instructions need to be repeated frequently. Not following these simple rules guarantees big QRM problems, but these days even ideal DXpedition operating tactics are accompanied by much interference.

- weak signals: when the DX signal is loud at the Callers' end the situation is much more controllable because the DX signal rides over QRM on his frequency and callers can hear instructions. This has been proven time after time, both with loud signals from nearby DXpeditions (e.g. 1AØ) and weak signals from far away (e.g. T32).

- propagation: the source of the problem is mostly, but not exclusively, Europe, so the difficulties mount whenever propagation allows European signals to be heard at the same time as the DX signal. When calling DX on the higher bands European signals are often within our skip dead-zone so cannot be heard or are weaker. This is yet another reason for DXpeditions to operate as much as possible on whichever band is just below the MUF. On the LF bands, however, those European signals can be heard and are usually loud. The peak band for Pile-Up Problems is definitely forty metres: this band provides good DX propagation to hear the far off DXpeditions but also provides loud European signals. We call it 'the zoo'.

Types

There are various categories of QRMers. Some blur at the edges of course, but most can be distinctly identified. There are not yet clear names for some of them, hence there is some confusion when discussing them.

- Pirates: this one is perhaps clear-cut and is not new. Pirates have been around for a long time, stations who transmit illegally with false or with someone else's call-sign. They do so purely for their own perverted pleasure, to enjoy the thrill of being called by many stations, while sitting in the comfort of their own home. Above all other categories these are the pariahs of the DX world and deserve only strong condemnation. DF tools are beginning to be used to identify them and DXers the world over should lend these initiatives their support. Then again, DXers could mitigate the problem by using common-sense: "WF'WL" (work first worry later) is a natural response but some situations are so blatant, like when a signal purporting to originate in the Indian Ocean was being transmitted from Canada. Or when a supposed 100-watt Afghanistan station was S9+30db in UK on 80 metres. Most DXers rely on the Cluster so this may be the place to warn fellow enthusiasts that a station is a Pirate.

- Frequency Kops: now we enter the less well-defined areas. Many years ago a 'Policeman' was trying to be helpful, to keep the DX frequency clear when he was operating split. He would say "UP" only when the DX was not transmitting, trying to help the caller who had hit the wrong VFO button. But nowadays these Policemen cause more problems than they solve, so they are either mis-guided or perhaps they are actually Deliberate QRMers (see below) damaging the DXpedition but pretending to be helpful. When a dozen stations all keep sending 'up' or similar for long periods surely their intentions are not honourable. Whatever we do we must resist the temptation to join in the chaos.

- Deliberate QRMers: these folk are out to destroy the DXpedition, along with the fun enjoyed by thousands of DX chasers. They do so by transmitting deliberate QRM on the DX frequency. They are anonymous and of course never explain why they do this, so we must merely write them off as social outcasts, hooligans. This group has become known as 'DQRM' but they need to be categorised separately from those who cause QRM unintentionally.

- Continuous Callers: now we reach a major source of the QRM problem, DX Chasers who damage the pile-up by transmitting their call-sign nearly continuously, no matter the instructions of the DX station. This group is further split into a) Heavy Boots, b) Unskilled and possibly c) a few DQRMers just trying to wreak havoc. The 'Heavy Boots' just call no matter what is happening on the frequency, demanding to get into the DX log at any cost, like pushing through a crowd unconcerned about the folk that they knock over on the way. The 'Unskilled' simply do not know how to operate in a pile-up situation but hope that continuously sending their call-sign will some-

how secure the QSO – this group includes a whole raft of under-skilled operators, perhaps including those who cannot copy CW. They need help to learn.

Solutions?

The tipping-point is a recognised statistical phenomenon. A trend becomes established, it then grows slowly but steadily. At some point in time the incidence suddenly takes off and the graph-line shoots up. This happened with DX pile-up Problems over just a very few recent years and the phenomenon is still growing. Once past the tipping-point, no action having been taken to curtail the activity, then some believe it is too late to correct, as it has by then become endemic. At first the DQRMers, for example, were just a couple of individuals, but they were not identified and taken (nor seen to be taken) to task, so they were left to get away with it. Others noted this and joined in, at first just a few, then many more. The same growth has been witnessed with Heavy Boots and the Unskilled. So now we accept it as 'situation normal' and mostly just shrug our shoulders.

Can the situation be retrieved? Probably not entirely. There is certainly no silver bullet. But we can at least try to slow or stop the growth, then possibly rein it in somewhat. If not then in the near future DX chasing may wither as more and more DXers throw in the towel, realising that they no longer enjoy the sub-hobby.

We may not be able to fight against the modern social trend of deteriorating morals but we can try to set good examples by our own behaviour. Any actions should have a clear goal to tackle one, and only one, of the above sources of the problem. IARU and ON4WW believe that education is the solution. Yes, this is an important partial solution to help reduce the number of 'Unskilleds'. Just one or two publicised DF successes could act as deterrence thereby reducing the number of DQRMers and Pirates. The 'Heavy Boots' (if they can be determined as different from 'Unskilleds') can be brought to book personally by, for example, withdrawing their club memberships and sacking from DXCC.

New Initiative

For some years N4AA and friends have enclosed a slip with direct cards, totalling over 40,000, to help spread the good word about how to operate in DX pile-up situations. This initiative has undoubtedly helped and we record our thanks to these fine chaps.

But we need new initiatives to take this forward: we must all act now with several different solutions. In terms of Education we can help newcomers and transgressors to learn how best to break the pile-up without destroying their own reputation and self-respect in the process. We can also try to help new DXpeditioners learn how best to minimise the chaos by choosing appropriate operating techniques.

One such new initiative, to help DX Chasers understand how best to operate, is being promulgated by the First Class CW Operators' Club. A "DX Code of Conduct" is now appearing in magazines and on websites across the world, translated into many languages. The Code appears elsewhere in this publication, but is only a beginning. All DXers are asked to help spread the word in local clubs to reach as many DX Chasers as possible. They could also adopt the system of 'Elmering' – helping a local guy to learn the ropes.

As so often in life it might be that just a small step taken by lots of people could help mitigate the problem, rather than some authority on high trying to lay down the law. After all, amateur radio is self-policing these days!

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Improving HF DX Operating Behaviour

I am writing to raise a matter of increasing concern about the standard of on-the-air operating. A number of your readers have, I'm sure, commented to you that there is now a serious problem with operating behaviour, especially when calling DX stations in pile-ups on the HF bands.

As President of *The First Class CW Operators' Club* (FOC), I and Randy, W6SJ, in partnership with leading DX operators, have decided that we will take the initiative to encourage all DXers to work together in order to improve standards. To this end we have created the following simple DX Code of Conduct which I would ask you to bring to the attention of your readers. If we all pull together to improve standards then we will all be able to work more DX and have more fun on-the-air.

More information is available as follows:

FOC website <http://www.g4foc.org/>;

March 2010 QST;

<<http://www.g4ifb.com/html/dxing.html#PileupTips>>

<<http://www.on4ww.be/operatingPracticeEnglish.html>>

Please translate the DX Code into your local language if that makes the message more effective.

Thanks for your help and 73,

Bob Whelan, G3PJT,

President, FOC

DX

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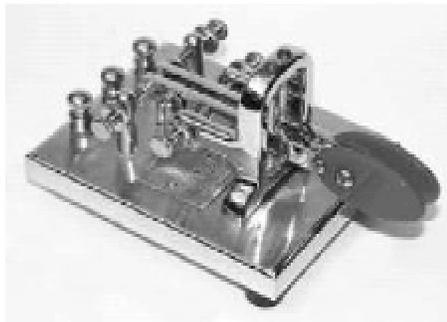
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DX CODE OF CONDUCT

by FOC

1. I WILL LISTEN, AND LISTEN, AND THEN LISTEN SOME MORE
2. I WILL ONLY CALL IF I CAN COPY THE DX STATION PROPERLY
3. I WILL NOT TRUST THE CLUSTER AND WILL BE SURE OF THE DX STATION'S CALL SIGN BEFORE CALLING
4. I WILL NOT INTERFERE WITH THE DX STATION NOR ANYONE CALLING HIM AND WILL NEVER TUNE UP ON THE DX FREQUENCY OR IN THE QSX SLOT
5. I WILL WAIT FOR THE DX STATION TO END A CONTACT BEFORE CALLING HIM
6. I WILL ALWAYS SEND MY FULL CALL SIGN
7. I WILL CALL AND THEN LISTEN FOR A REASONABLE INTERVAL. I WILL NOT CALL CONTINUOUSLY.
8. I WILL NOT TRANSMIT WHEN THE DX OPERATOR CALLS ANOTHER CALL SIGN, NOT MINE
9. I WILL NOT TRANSMIT WHEN THE DX OPERATOR QUERIES A CALL SIGN NOT LIKE MINE
10. I WILL NOT TRANSMIT WHEN THE DX STATION CALLS OTHER GEOGRAPHIC AREAS THAN MINE
11. WHEN THE DX OPERATOR CALLS ME, I WILL NOT REPEAT MY CALL SIGN UNLESS I THINK HE HAS COPIED IT INCORRECTLY
12. I WILL BE THANKFUL IF AND WHEN I DO MAKE A CONTACT
13. I WILL RESPECT MY FELLOW HAMS AND CONDUCT MYSELF SO AS TO EARN THEIR RESPECT

The International DX Association

Daily DX Information Session—14.236 MHz @ 2330Z

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INDEXA is dedicated to promoting goodwill among amateur radio operators of the world; promoting good amateur radio operating practices; and providing support for DX operations in rare and semi-rare countries.

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Thank you and Good DX!