



They're the vigilantes of the airwaves, self-appointed enforcers of what they perceive as proper etiquette and procedure in DX pileups, ranging from an unidentified "Up 5!" at best to profanity-filled rants directed toward the DX station at worst. Psychologist WB2REM takes a look at what makes a "DX Cop" tick.

## The **DX COP**: Protector or Offender?

BY JIM MILLNER,\* WB2REM

**T**hese days, when you hear a DXpedition, you will likely also find *DX Cops*. As a ham radio operator for more than 50 years, it seems that DX Cops today tend to be much more mean-spirited and disruptive rather than helpful as in the past.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with the term, DX Cops come in a couple of distinct forms. By definition, a DX Cop is a self-appointed vigilante frequency policeman who

believes by intervening in a DX pileup he can control stations that violate the DX station's rules. In theory, this is noble behavior, as we saw in the early years of ham radio. However, in practice, their behavior has been questionable in recent years.

In my opinion, approximately 10% of the DX Cops have good intentions and can be considered "protectors." They make brief, informative, and directed transmissions. For example, one casual DXer told me that "during one recent Caribbean DXpedition that will remain unnamed, the 10-meter op was working people and identifying regularly, but

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never indicated where he was listening. Being that 10 meters is a big band with lots of space, I took that to mean that he might be operating simplex and started calling him on his transmit frequency just in case. Another op quickly informed me where he was listening and I moved up there. I don't know if he qualified as a DX Cop, but in this case, I appreciated his comment since he provided information that the DX station did not, and helped reduce any QRM I might have been causing by calling on his transmit frequency."

The other 90% of DX Cops are what I call "offenders" and have motivations and intentions contrary to the purpose of helping others work rare DX stations.

### The Psychology of the DX Cop

As a psychologist, I find it fascinating to listen to the offenders. They remind me of some of my less-healthy mentally ill patients. The offenders come from all age groups and run the gamut of newbies and old timers to foreigners and domestic operators. The key factor is they are on the DX's frequency specifically *to disrupt, not to help*. So the question arises, why do they create confusion and discontent?

Attention-seeking behavior combined with making others miserable appears to be the main theme. I believe this behavior comes from a number of psychological, socio-economic, and geographical issues.

Psychologically, many DX Cops feel inferior to the big gun stations who can easily work the rarest of DX. They become frustrated after numerous calls and feel that the only way they can release their frustration is to make it difficult for others to hear and work the DX station. Inherent in the DX Cops' behavior is a perceived feeling of insecurity and inferiority delineated by their inability to buy powerful stations and antennas, leaving them less than inept to work the DX. They are operating on a different playing field.

Likewise, geographical/regional issues play a major part in the DX Cop mentality. When a DXpedition is perceived as favoring a certain part of the world, DX Cop activity seems to increase. Next time you hear a rare DX station working the U.S. or North America, listen to see how many foreign stations are self-policing the frequency. The same occurs with foreign stations being called and U.S. stations acting as DX Cops. Just imagine the impressions that shortwave listeners come away

with when they hear screaming DX Cops rants filled with profanity. In some cases, it has even gotten to the point where DX Cops will identify and announce stations on the DX frequency that they believe are calling out of turn off frequency.

### What to Do?

The question arises as to what can be done to rid the bands of the DX Cops. The obvious answer is that DX Cops need to learn to be polite and appropriate. This includes realizing that people make mistakes and may occasionally, in the process of creating a split frequency on their radio, reverse the frequency pair. In most of those cases, telling a person to split is ineffective because the other station probably is not even listening on the DX frequency (remember, the split is reversed). If a DX Cop feels that he must comment, say it briefly with the least amount of disruption to others.

There are a number of things a DX station can do to reduce the effectiveness of the DX Cop. One obvious thing is to announce the split after each contact. If a calling station doesn't have access to a DX cluster, he/she may have no idea where the DX station is listening without this verbal announcement.

Secondly, when a DX station targets a particular region for contacts, this tactic tends to promote animosity and a feeling of partiality. If possible, a DX

station should allow propagation to determine areas of coverage. This can be accomplished by the DX station turning his/her antenna away from the area of best propagation, thus enabling each area to have equal access and effectively equalizing signal strength<sup>1</sup>.

Finally, DX stations need to be sensitive to the disparity between big gun stations and stations with limited operating conditions. Calls for QRP and other less fortunate stations could help improve this disparity. (*One encouraging step in this direction is the designation by some DXpeditions of their final day on the air as "ATNO Day," in which they seek to work only stations who need them for an "All-Time New One."* – ed.)

### Conclusion

DXing is a fun and challenging aspect of our hobby. With the advent of the mean-spirited DX Cop over the last few years, there has been an obvious decline in civility in this area of our hobby. If it continues, this fracture could ruin the essence of amateur radio.

### Note:

1. Not all DXers or DXpeditioners agree with this approach. Some DXpeditions make special efforts to contact regions that do not have favorable propagation or whose signals are blocked by a wall of much louder stations in between during brief band openings. – ed.

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