

## **Amateur Radio License Plates**

Amateur Radio (ham) radio operators also communicate locally, primarily through FM frequencies allocated by the FCC. All operators are licensed by the Federal Communications Commission after rigorous testing. Most amateurs communicate through UHF FM and VHF FM frequencies through a “repeater” which re-transmits the signal instantaneously. It is usually on a tower or high building (or a mountain), and allows transmission over many miles. Most repeaters have backup power and many individual hams have a personal power supply that’s independent of the grid, making this technology ideal in the midst of a disaster.

This technology has been used successfully in many different situations. In 1997, the Red River Valley was ravaged by a flood and the cell service crashed for a while, and hams helped out with communications in the Red River Valley. Sanford, Essentia, and other hospitals have an FM Amateur radio in them for a back up communication system in the event of an emergency. These radios are not provided by the hospitals, but rather by local clubs or individual hams. The local Fargo ARES, Amateur Radio Emergency Services provides backup service for ambulances in the event their systems fail.

There are three levels of Amateur Radio licensure through the FCC, and two of levels allow communication over high frequency (short-wave). Depending upon the ionospheric conditions, it is common for amateur operators to talk across the state and the world. They can even talk to the International Space Station.

Most states recognize the value of Amateur Radio and make special license plates available for hams. These usually have the words “Amateur Radio”, “Ham Radio”, “Emergency Services” or some similar logo on them. All of the states that issue such places have the car owner’s “call sign”. This is assigned by the FCC when a license is granted. A call sign must be used on the air every 10 minutes of transmission by a ham. The call sign identifies a person as an Amateur Radio Operator. In the United States, the call sign always has three to five letters and one number in the middle.

Most hams have radios in all of their cars and trucks. North Dakota law currently provides for only one car per ham having an amateur license plate.

Many states allow multiple cars owned by a ham to have the same call sign with an appended number for the second, third, etc cars. Having the words “Amateur Radio” on the plate makes it very easy for law enforcement, fire, and other civil authorities to recognize a car licensed to a ham and would facilitate entry to restricted areas in the case of an emergency. There is no cost to taxpayers for this bill, and upon talking with DOT, this bill creates no problems in the manufacture of our license plates.