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Canada's National Amateur Radio Society

*"We're ALL about Amateur Radio!"  
"Tous ensemble pour la radioamateur!"*

## A submission by Radio Amateurs of Canada in regards to Bill 118

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Radio Amateurs of Canada (RAC) represents the 50,000 Canadians who are federally licensed amateur radio operators, of which some 20,000 reside in the province of Ontario. This submission supports the provincial government initiative to limit the use of hand-held cellular telephones in moving vehicles.

This submission is offered to provide information useful in the formation of the Bill so that it does not inadvertently restrict the use of two-way radio equipment by amateur radio operators while operating their vehicles.

RAC is in complete agreement with the intention of the proposal to limit the use of hand-held cellular telephones when used in a vehicle which is in motion. We believe that this common practice is an impediment to road safety as it creates a distraction that can adversely affect a driver's ability to maintain a clear view of the roadway.

However the use of two-way mobile communications equipment such as the radios used by emergency responders (police, fire, ambulance), provincial and municipal vehicles (snowplows, Hydro, supervisory vehicles) amateur radio operators and others (such as taxis, delivery vehicles, Red Cross) does not restrict the operator's ability to maintain constant awareness of the roadway.

(NOTE: A demonstration was provided to ministry officials on Thursday, February 19, 2009 by amateur radio operators Alasdair A. Robertson, executive director of the Canadian Association of Rally Sport, and Peter West, vice president of public relations for Radio Amateurs of Canada at the Ministry Offices at 1201 Wilson Ave. Toronto, Ontario.)

As you are no doubt aware, the province of Newfoundland and Labrador has had similar legislation in effect since 2002, and there is similar legislation in Nova Scotia and Quebec either enacted or in development. Those laws and bills all include sections which clearly define activities that are excluded from enforcement. In those three provinces, amateur radio operation is in no way restricted.

We request that Bill 118 include an explicit exemption for federally licensed radio amateurs operating their amateur radio equipment in their vehicles.

## Background

Radio amateurs (also known as Ham Radio operators) have passed demanding examinations set by the Federal Ministry of Industry to earn their authority to operate radio equipment. Federal radio regulations specifically permit radio amateurs to establish mobile stations.

By tradition, radio amateurs are public-spirited citizens who regularly volunteer their time, skill, equipment and energy to serve the public by providing emergency communications in time of need. In 1994, after decades of mutual cooperation and respect, RAC and The Canadian Red Cross Society signed a memorandum of agreement where RAC pledges to provide volunteer emergency communications to The Red Cross in those times of need. The memorandum specifically states that RAC will establish and maintain fixed, mobile and portable emergency radio communications.

Since the days of Marconi, there have been ham radio operators and from that time until today, amateur radio operators have served their communities in times of disaster. The most recent example is the countless hours of service that Australian ham radio operators have devoted to providing vital communications links from remote towns and communities devastated by raging deadly bush fires.

Here in Canada, hundreds of ham radio operators have joined CANWARN a volunteer organization of ham radio operators who report severe weather to Environment Canada. This spotting service confirms on the ground what government satellites and radars see in the atmosphere. When Environment Canada issues severe weather watches or warnings, they alert CANWARN's ham radio volunteers in the affected areas.

In Ontario, amateur radio operators were instrumental in providing two-way radio communication for the Canadian Red Cross during the 1998 Ice Storm and the 1985 Barrie Tornado. In both of these widespread disasters all other forms of communications including cellular telephone and even police and fire radios were rendered useless until power could be restored. Amateur radio equipment, especially equipment installed in motor vehicles, was unaffected by the loss of commercial power.

Locally, amateur radio operators using their mobile two-way radios assist their communities by providing non-emergency communications for special events such as car rallies, marathon runs, parades and other community-related events. On a more serious side, amateur radio operators using their two-way radio mobile equipment have provide supportive communications services during searches for lost children and many provide a "community watch" service on Hallowe'en.

In recognition of their long years of service, the Government of Ontario, and the Ministry of Transportation in particular, since 1976, have allowed amateur radio operators to obtain vehicle license plates bearing our federally issued amateur radio call signs (beginning VE3 or VA3) for a small administrative fee. These license plates are not administered in the same manner as vanity plates. We would offer that this government practice suggests that the exemption we are requesting in regards to the use of two-way radio equipment by licensed radio amateurs in Ontario would be completely consistent with previous government practices.

## In conclusion

The growth of amateur radio continues unabated around the world and here in Ontario. Both a community service and a fascinating personal activity, amateur radio provides opportunities for licensed individuals to communicate with other government-licensed hams across town, across Canada, around the world and now, into Space, thanks to the International Space Station (most astronauts are licensed by their own governments as ham radio operators as amateur radio is a back-up communications service to NASA).

The use of two-way mobile radio equipment has been an integral part of ham radio since the days of the first motor vehicles. On behalf of all federally licensed amateur radio operators in Ontario, I respectfully submit this information to you on this day, Thursday, February 19, 2009.

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