

ARRL VUAC Committee Executive Report

To The ARRL Board of Directors

July 2009

Respectively submitted by:
Kermit A. Carlson, W9XA
VUAC Committee Chairman

VUAC Executive Report

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This has been a busy spring for the VUAC committee. We have debated, discussed and come to consensus on two specific points of business and followed with great interest the reaction of the contesting community to the recent rules changes for the ARRL Contests on the bands above 50 Mhz.

The first new recommendation made in the new year was a slight change to the rules for the ARRL International EME contest which had been forwarded to the P&SC Committee in advance of the January 2009 Board meeting. After careful consideration of comments from the EME contesting community and after internal deliberation, the VUAC decided to recommend to the P&SC that the ARRL International EME contest should include operations on the 222 MHz and 903 MHz bands. The original proposal made in January did not include these bands. This change was accepted as an amendment to the January proposal and the rules as amended were approved by the P&SC on June 4, 2009.

Several recommendation made to the P&SC Committee prior to the January 2009 P&SC Committee meeting were adjudicated by the P&SC at their meeting on April 4, 2009. The aforementioned changes to the EME Contest Rules were adopted as recommended. A second recommendation to include club competition in the ARRL UHF contest was also approved at that same meeting and approved by the Awards Committee on May 22, 2009. The VUAC had also proposed to refine the definition of the Limited Rover from any four bands to the lowest four bands; this was accepted and approved by the Awards Committee on May 22, 2009. A fourth proposal advanced in January by the VUAC was to reduce the number of allowed rover to rover contacts for all but the Unlimited Rover, this proposal was rejected.

Committee members continue the on-going effort to gather the consensus of the contest community active on the higher bands. VUAC members gather this information through email, special interest reflectors and attendance at conferences. A sampling of the VUAC members' activities found that in the spring of this year New England Division Representative Ed Parish, K1EP, attended the 35th Eastern VHF/UHF Conference; Southeastern Division Representative Jim Worsham, W4KXY, hosted a VUAC/Contesting Q&A session at the Southeastern VHF Society Conference in Charlotte, NC on April 25, 2009. Army Curtis, AE5P, the Gulf Coast Division Representative spoke to the North Texas Microwave Society on April 4th, and to the Roadrunners Microwave Group on April 18. Dakota Division Representative Jon Platt, WØZQ, met with active VHF/UHF testers at the Dakota Division Convention on May 30.

The VUAC also discussed, debated and developed a whitepaper that explains the reasoning and rational for the VUAC's recommended rule changes to the ARRL International EME Contest. A copy of the whitepaper is attached to this report as Appendix A, *Rules for the ARRL International EME Competition, VHF-UHF Advisory Committee, 24 April 2009*. Both the new changes to the Contest rules and the whitepaper have been well received by the EME contest community

Respectfully submitted,
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July 2009**

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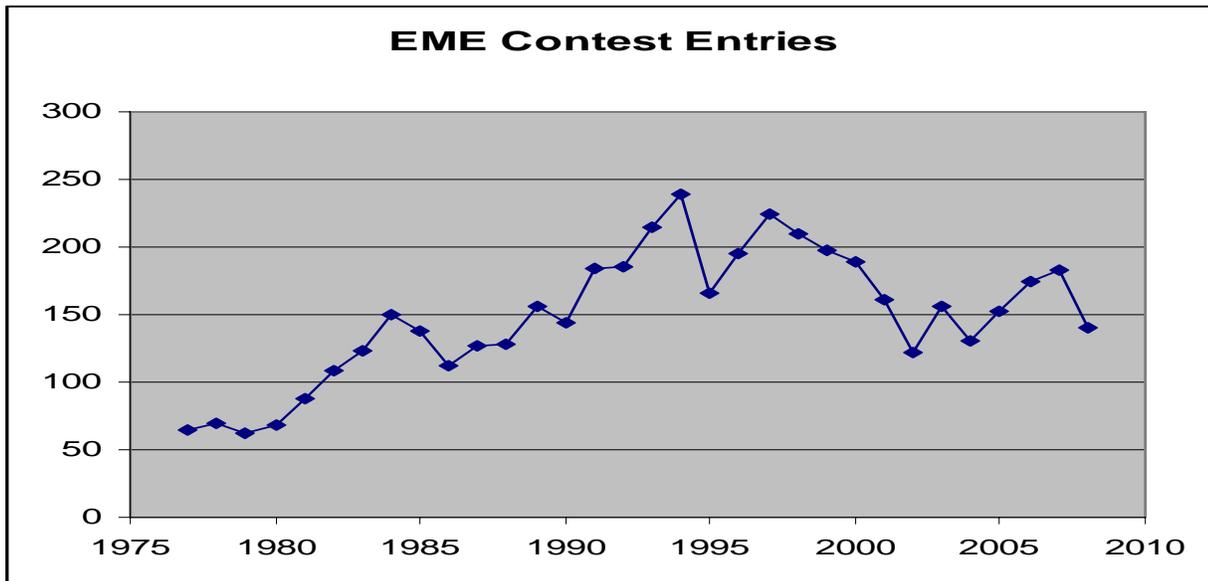
Rules for the ARRL International EME Competition

VHF/UHF Advisory Committee

April 24, 2009

Technologies and operating practices in EME continue to evolve, and rules for the ARRL International EME Competition have evolved to keep pace. Recent changes have allowed digital contacts (2003), expanded the contest from two weekends to three (2004), and introduced a “Single Operator Assisted” category (2005). The scope of permissible assistance was further spelled out in the 2007 rules.

Ideally, contest rule changes should lead to increased activity, more participants, and more fun for all. The history of entries in the ARRL EME contest is shown in the following graph. The number of submitted logs has declined since the mid-1990’s, but no clear trend is evident since 2000.



No rules changes were made in 2008, but public discussion of the rules has continued unabated. The VUAC has been listening, monitoring, and debating the possible need for further rule changes. The following Q&A section provides information to the EME contesting community on how the information was collected, what topics were discussed, and what further changes are recommended.

How did the VUAC collect information?

VUAC members are VHF/UHF contesters themselves, so they are in close touch with much of the VHF/UHF contest community in North America. Information and opinions on the EME contest have also been received via the following specific channels:

- *Soapbox* and *From the Participants* comments on the ARRL contest-results web pages
- Emails sent to the ARRL Contest Branch Manager and forwarded to the VUAC
- Open forum on contesting at the 2008 International EME Conference in Florence, Italy
- Town-Hall sessions on VHF contesting at several regional VHF conferences
- Public posts on the *Moon-Net* and *Moon* Internet reflectors
- Monthly newsletter *432 and Above EME News*, by K2UYH
- *Net Notes*, summary of weekly EME net on 14.345 MHz, by K1RQG
- Personal communications to individual VUAC members

What specific issues were addressed?

1. Allocation of weekends by band? The committee received several suggestions for different scheduling of three contest weekends by band. An attractive arrangement for some multi-band stations would be something like the following:

- 432, 1296, 5.7G+
- 50, 144, 2.3G, 3.4G
- 50, 144, 432, 1296

Unfortunately, some criteria for selecting optimum EME contest weekends (e.g., when the moon is in a cold region of the sky, or close to perigee) are very different at VHF and at microwave frequencies. The majority view is that microwave activity is best scheduled on its own separate weekend. The committee concurs, and no change is recommended.

2. CW and Digital on different weekends? A vocal (and sizable) minority would prefer full separation of CW and Digital by weekend. The principle disadvantage is that one CW weekend and one Digital weekend would provide only half as much time for CW-only or Digital-only operators on the VHF/UHF bands. Multi-band operators would find this limitation particularly troublesome: switching bands often requires a time consuming feed change that may be difficult or dangerous, especially at night, while changing modes requires only the flip of a switch. Two other organizations sponsor international EME contests in which CW and Digital activity is separated; the committee heard no persuasive arguments that all EME contests should be the same in this respect. On balance, the committee concurs with the majority of received opinions — all modes should be permitted on each weekend of the EME contest. No change is recommended.

3. Assisted category? The principle argument in favor of assistance is that real-time self-spotting and arranging of schedules allows higher QSO totals for stations using them. Counter-arguments are many, and include the following:

- Too many people have abused the rules by talking their way through QSO's.
- It's impossible for a third party to police, and self-policing hasn't worked very well.

- Unassisted stations have more trouble making QSO's because operating procedures are very different. Many assisted stations do not call CQ and do not listen for tail-enders; most of their contacts are explicitly arranged.
- The Assisted category was "intended to encourage smaller stations and operators who may be new to EME" [see rules 5.3.4, 5.3.8], but in practice it has not worked out that way.
- Self-spotting and solicitation of schedules is antithetical to most radio contesting practices.
- Those who like operating with assistance have 50 other weekends per year in which to do it.

Everyone seems to agree that EME contest operation on the microwave bands (2.3 GHz and up) should be permitted to use non-EME communications to coordinate activity. Such a provision would apply to all microwave bands where EME is still largely experimental; the list of bands may change over time. No separate category is required.

The VUAC concludes that allowing self-spotting and real-time schedule-making in the EME contest has been a failed experiment. We recommend elimination of the Assisted categories.

4. Separate categories for Analog, Digital, and Mixed-Mode? A vocal minority would prefer not to have a Mixed-Mode category in the contest. In practice, Mixed-Mode operation has been very popular (65 of 183 logs in 2007, 62 of 140 in 2008), so it's hard to see any advantage in its elimination. All other ARRL VHF/UHF/microwave contests provide for mixed-mode entries: indeed, all of the other contests are fully mode-independent. The majority opinion considers it important to maintain separate Analog-only categories for the EME contest. The committee therefore recommends that the three separate categories be retained and that the rules be aligned with this recommendation to indicate that a station may be worked only once per band regardless of mode.
5. Too many band categories? Most people think there are too many categories, but like having single-band awards and a multi-band award. Three multi-band categories (50–1296 MHz, 2.3 GHz and Up, and All-Band) seems like overkill; our conclusion is that just one, Multi-Band, is enough. More importantly, there were many requests for recognizing "band winners" on each band, with multi-band as well as single-band logs being eligible. This could be accomplished in a manner similar to the January, June, and September VHF contests, where band winners are bold-faced in the line scores. Certificates with appropriate endorsements would recognize these winners. This would require listing single-band scores for each multi-band station, in addition to their overall multi-band score.
6. Improvements in presentation of results? Making multi-band stations eligible for single-band awards or endorsements would require some straightforward changes to the line scores. Many participants would like to see band-by-band QSO and multiplier totals for each submitted log, perhaps in an online database like those provided for most other ARRL contests. Several participants mentioned the importance of careful proofreading of contest results before they are sent to the printer or posted on the ARRL web site. Perhaps the Contest Branch Manager could ask one or two League members active on EME to help with this task — it is mostly a matter of catching typos, assignments to a wrong band or wrong category, etc., which would usually be obvious to an active EME operator. It might be time to strongly encourage logs in Cabrillo format.

Summary of recommended changes

As a guiding principle, the VUAC attempted to respond to expressed wishes of EME contest participants while simplifying the rules and the task of contest administration. After careful review and much discussion, we recommend that the EME contest rules incorporate the following changes:

- Eliminate Assisted operating categories.
- Offer only one Multi-band operating category.
- Include single-band totals of multi-band stations in the single-band listings. Such totals are eligible for single-band awards or endorsements.
- Clarify that stations may be worked for credit once per band regardless of mode.

Who and what is the VHF/UHF Advisory Committee?

The ARRL's VUAC is comprised of one Director-appointed volunteer representative from each of the 15 ARRL Divisions, plus one Canadian representative. The VUAC reports directly to the ARRL Board's Program and Services Committee, and is currently chaired by the representative from the Central Division. Full information regarding this volunteer committee can be found on the ARRL's website at <http://www.arrl.org/contests/vuac.html>

