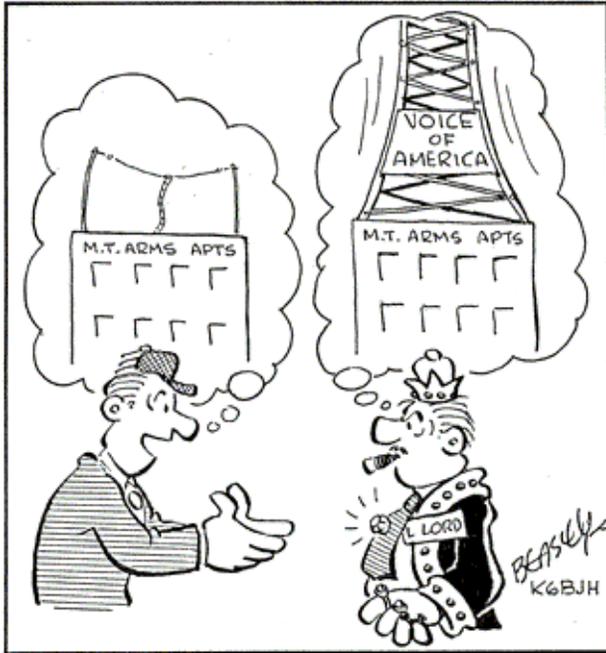


Welcome to Rentsville, DX

Think apartment living means second-rate hamming? Think again! Combine a QRP attitude with a 39th-floor antenna and you have a winning combination that'll work the world—without annoying your neighbors or your landlord! Here's how!



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Ever been there? Somewhere along highway PL-259, after passing through the hamlets of Parent's House and Dormville, young hams out to discover the world will almost always stop for a while in Rentsville. They'll find cute little lodgings in warren-like settings, lots of nearby neighbors and kiddies, and older folks who've returned for the advantages of lawn-free living—the whole presided over by the ubiquitous, crusty-but-benign local official, Mayor Landlord.

While he's not God, Mayor Landlord often confuses himself with that lofty personage, the result being that he can be by turns generous, and then full of wrath, giving and smiting with the same hand. When dealing with deities, real and imagined, your prayers may seemingly fall on deaf ears. Step out of line, however, and He's on you like coffee on a keyboard.

Thus the challenge. How do earnest young adventurers (or older, you-can-too-go-home-again hams) get past His Majesty's objections and radiate shortwave energy into the cosmos with neighbors, TVs, telephones and other RF-sensitive devices only a few feet away? Is it even possible?

The answer is yes, of course, and here's a surprise—once you get over the hurdles (Mayor Landlord being the tallest), you might find that your apartment QTH is one of the best setups you've ever had! I know that after years of working thirty-over signals from hams with back-forties, decommissioned BBC amplifiers and more wire in the air than Nynex, you might be skeptical. But read on—this is a primer for Rentsville residents. Follow it closely and you can wind up in logbook heaven.

Location, Location, Location

You'll have to deal with three specific elements here in Rentsville—the location, the landlord, and the neighbors. Location comes first. This may sound elementary, but think carefully about the hamming potential of any rental property you're considering before you move in. One of the advantages of being a tenant is that there's usually some choice as to where you live. You might want to be close to home, school, or whatever—but be sure to add ham radio to the list.

Your first choice for skyhooks is the roof. Even a five-story building will put your antennas higher than 50 feet, so think of rooftops as towers. Take a look from the street to see if the building is surrounded by steel and concrete. If you're lucky the roof will be in the clear. If you can get inside, hike up the stairs and see if the roof access is kept unlocked. If it's open, head up there and check things out.

Are there any convenient structures that can serve as antenna mounting points? (Utility structures such as power conduits, telephone poles and lightning rods are *not* choices, but service structures, old towers and masts can be.) See any plumbing vents? I know a high-rise ham who has feed lines routed straight into a bathroom many stories down through one of these.

Have a look around and think about how you'd get some wire up in the air without impacting the building itself. If it looks hopeless, the building might not be a candidate. If it looks encouraging, maybe it's time to talk to the landlord. Of course, if you can't get up on the roof you'll have to cover this step later, with His Highness in tow.

His Highness

Dealing with Mayor Landlord is the make-or-break phase of this process, so be prepared. Ask yourself, "What do landlords really want?" Landlords, by the way, typically think about what they *don't* want—hassles, problems, noise, complaints, damage, etc. The only positive is usually "rent paid on time."

You'll eventually broach the subject of getting up on the roof, but take the time to address conventional concerns first. Dress nicely, comb your hair and brush your teeth before the rendezvous. Rave about the building, the lobby, and the neighborhood. You'll probably have to describe what you do to earn a living, so be prepared to answer in a manner that portrays you in the best possible light (you're not merely a student, you're finishing your degree in cetacean biology while working part-time).

Once you're on a roll, mention your genuine interest in the apartment (yes, it has to be genuine—you're going to live here, remember?). If you want to look at other places, don't bring up ham radio now—wait until you're ready to settle the deal. Saving this point until you're ready to close will encourage landlord cooperation.

When you're ready, ask about the roof. He'll want to know why you're interested, but make him wait. Say something like, "Let's go up there and have a look while I tell you all about it."

Once on the roof, examine it for suitability and explain your interests. "I have a short-wave radio, and it would be great if I could put a little antenna up here—what do you think?" The landlord's next words are important. If it's "No, forget it," don't launch into a major argument. Act mildly surprised and say, "Oh, I'm surprised. Why?"

He'll reel off a list of concerns, only some of which will likely be justified. Listen carefully to any objections and patiently explain why he needn't worry. Have some photos on hand of a similar installation that shows a simple wire antenna. Show that the physical impact is nil. It'll be your little secret—and it would even be worth a couple of extra bucks in rent (you might say) if he accepts. Then, as they say in sales, ask for the order. Stick out your hand and say, "C'mon, whaddya say? I'm ready to move in."

If his answer is "yes," you're home. All that remains to guarantee your eternal satisfaction is to get him add the following to your lease agreement: "Access to the roof is permitted at any time for antenna installation and/or repair."

If the answer is "no," tell him that radio is important to you, that you love the place, but you're going to keep looking. Ask him to think about it and get back to you. You never know. Then move on. And don't sweat it—you'll find another landlord who's willing to consider it.

The Neighbors

Now that you're in and getting ready to set up, remember your immense responsibility to keep your station interference free. You owe it to every person in the building (and to hams the world over) to keep to that high standard. Although we have the right to operate and, yes, most TVs and telephones are inadequately protected, too many hams ignore the impact they have on their neighbor's peace and quiet until it's too late. That gives us all a bad reputation and makes it that much harder to set up in Rentsville the next time around. Give your neighbors a break and commit yourself to no-impact hamming!

Linear amplifiers are dealt with in two words—forget it. Sorry, that should be six words—forget it, forget it, forget it. You simply can't expect to radiate enough RF energy to heat a reasonably sized room within six feet of a neighbor's telephone line without causing problems. Just as people adapt to life in New York without a car, and to life in Pittsburgh without any fun (sorry, Pittsburgh), you too will adapt to life in Rentsville without much power. Keep in mind that your skyhook is now 50, 60, 100 or whatever feet in the air—a veritable DX megatower!

Think about all those articles you've read about expert operating techniques, balanced antennas, minimizing feed-line radiation,

adding RF filtering to power supplies, etc. And apply them all—every last one! Get serious about lightning protection, too. You may have more antenna height than ever before, and nearby strikes will probably be more frequent. A quality lightning arrestor will pay for itself in short order, sending those currents to a solid electrical ground (found in most wall receptacles) instead of through the front end of your rig. It's going to happen, so prepare for it.

Proper RF grounding is something else you can't ignore. If you find you're being "bitten" by RF whenever you transmit, it's time to look into RF grounding. Quarter-wavelength radials for each band of operation can be attached to your equipment and will easily fit under carpets or behind baseboards. Artificial-ground tuners (such as the one made by MFJ) are a great help. Put RF chokes on all your gear—and on anything else close enough to your station to pick up stray signals, including your phone, stereo, etc.

One annoying type of interference we don't always think of is sound pollution. If you're contesting at 2 AM, use headphones and keep your voice down. Like the thumping disco music next door, barking "CQ Dog X-ray" 400 times can be bothersome. Do unto others, amigo.

Finally, if you hear even the slightest whisper of a complaint, fix it! And don't even think of mentioning to neighbors that your "second-order intermodulation products and spurious responses are well below the 30-dB level specified in FCC regulations." That's a spurious response if I ever heard one!

If your neighbors have a problem, you probably know how to fix it with one of the many solutions offered in the *ARRL Handbook*, supplier's catalogues and articles like this, so just swallow the \$6 and install a filter on their phones, TVs or stereos. They'll never bother you again, and they'll tell anyone who asks, including other neighbors having problems, what a great person you are.

After helping out, examine your station and figure out why the RF is causing problems in the first place. Try to improve on your operation. Be totally responsible and you'll be well on your way to hassle-free Rentsville hamming.



A clean, neat apartment station calls for low power, properly dressed cables and everything in its place. Organize around the principle of low impact. The result is as good for your logbook as it is for your friends, relatives and neighbors.

Up and Running

Once established and operating impact-free, you're within earshot of Ham Paradise. You have a clean, well-operated station. You're not bothering anyone, and nobody's bothering you. What's next?

Your virtual tower is probably higher than any you've had before, with an easy stair climb to the toptop (rooftop) level. Loops, folded dipoles, wire beams and VHF beams can all be easily installed and tinkered with. And most rooftops are made of materials that won't bother your antennas all that much. Things are looking good! This can have fantastic results concerning how well you'll hear and get out. Expect to work stations you never have before.

Once you've been there a while you can consider erecting wooden tripod supports for your various needs. Whatever you put up

there, make safety a meticulous concern. Secure anything that might move with heavy-duty safety lines. You don't want anything, including yourself, winding up on the street below. Inspect your installation regularly, and do it like a pro.

Take a personal interest in the overall rooftop environment by cleaning up garbage and keeping things neat. If your landlord or anyone else ever wanders up there, they'll see that things are being attended to by someone who's concerned about the safety of the building and its occupants. It's good PR for hams in general, and you in particular.

On the QT(H)

If you already live in an apartment or you have important reasons for staying in a particular location—and your level of confidence in gaining your landlord's cooperation is low—consider Stealth Hamming. If you don't ask, the landlord can't say no. You may still be able to get some wire up on the roof (feed line and all) with no one being the wiser. The same goes for balcony antennas, wires hanging down the side of the building, indoor antennas or window-mounted clotheslines.

If you go this route, be just as persnickity about stray radiation and interference—even more so! Do everything by the book and use low power. If you hear gossip in the hall about "funny stuff" on TVs, stereos and the like, tell your neighbors, "Hey, I had that problem, too, but my friend gave me one of these handy-dandy little filters and it went away. Want me to get you one?" You may be able to erase the tracks of your radio presence without giving yourself away.

Rentsville can be a nice place to call home, even when part of calling it home is calling the world. Many hams have the log books to prove successful and satisfying Rentsville operations that span years, with good neighbor relations to boot. So why not you?

You'll need a little psychology, good operating and engineering techniques and an unswerving devotion to no-impact hamming. Be assured that it can be done. In exchange, you can get tremendous antenna heights, a rooftop antenna lab and one of the cleanest stations in town. Rather than constraining your operation, you may find that in Rentsville, DX stands for "Downright X-traordinary!"