When A.G. is of two minds on some subject, that's four times more than usual!

ASK MISTER ANSWER GUY™

by A. Guy (BS, MYOB, PDQ)

•Dear Answer Guy: On a recent TV show, I heard some guy claim leopards have been spotted in the southwestern U.S. Can that be true? - Skeptical

As far as I know, leopards are spotted everywhere they're found.

That's kind of what makes them leopards, after all.

•Hi, A.G.: I hope you won't think this message is too crazy, but I've got a serious problem. Before I ask about it, you need to know I'm incredibly shy. It took me months just to work up the courage to write to you. – Bashful

That's OK. I'm a very shy person myself. In fact, if it weren't for my world-famous sense of humility, I might even lay claim to being the most shy person on the planet!

How can I help?

Well, I've been fascinated with the idea of running a HiFER beacon, maybe also a LowFER. But I'm afraid someone might actually hear it and send me reception reports! The thought of interacting with listeners is terrifying.

If I ever do decide to put a beacon on the air, how can I keep it from being reported?

Beacon monitors are very persistent folks, so it may not be possible to prevent all reports; but there are some simple, time-tested measures you can take to reduce the odds of anyone catching you. Feel free to mix and match any of these techniques to boost their report-avoidance capability.

If you're not absolutely determined to avoid reports entirely, but just want to reduce the odds a bit, these first steps are moderately effective:

-*Use conventional speed Morse only.* It takes nothing but a radio and ears to copy, and our beacon editor says it's sometimes great fun.

But for weak signals, it's also around 10 dB less efficient than QRSS3 (popular on 22 meters), close to 20 dB less effective than QRSS30 (common at 1750 meters), and other slow digital modes like FSK or DFCW.

Also, for improved report avoidance, don't even *think* about alternating between CW and digital! That would give both sets of listeners a chance of copying your signal, doubling the risk someone might send you a report.

-*Insist on using a directional antenna.* With built-in nulls, a dipole or loop cuts your potential coverage by nearly half. Even in the main lobes, high-angle radiation can sometimes interfere with your own signal, making for worse copy.

-*Avoid frequency stability.* Use a poorly designed oscillator with the cheapest crystal you can possibly buy. At all costs, avoid keeping the oscillator in a temperature controlled environment. That'll greatly impair decoding of digital modes. Even with CW, if your signal isn't the same place from

day to day, listeners will have to depend on sheer luck to run across it again.

That'll teach 'em not to waste their time and yours!

Now, if you want to improve your odds against being bothered by reports, step up to one of these tips, listed in order of increasing effectiveness:

-*Maintain a complex or even outright random schedule.* Be off for any length of time or for any reason at all…storms, drought, new moon, full moon, holidays, workdays, or just anything. Eventually, folks will tire of looking.

-*Never update your beacon listing.* When you make frequency, mode, or schedule changes, just don't tell anyone. You'll still be on, but fewer listeners will find you.

Misdirection is a huge tool…and by keeping folks in the dark, you can be one too!

-*Never check your signal from a distance after you're up and running.* Eventually, an antenna connection will corrode, coax will break or short, or a PA transistor will go bad. The signal will still be plenty loud on your own premises, but those pesky reports from other people will magically fade away. Problem solved.

Finally, if you want to raise your non-reportability to the absolute max, go with one of these plans:

-*Bury your signal in the noise.* This used to be the only sure-fire, 100% effective way to actually be on the air but never receive a single HiFER report from outside your own neighborhood—plant your carrier right dead center in the mid-band noise; or under a regionally prominent PLC cluster, in the case of LowFERs.

I say "used to be" because a couple of times this year, through a remarkable series of geographic and propagation coincidences, there have been a couple of times when mid-band ISM noise was low enough to be able to copy a legitimate HiFER in the midst of it, at just the right distance. Thus, this is no longer absolute protection against getting reports. But such cases remain rare thus far, so you're still reasonably safe.

-*Don't publicize your beacon at all.* When you put it on the air, never let our beacon editor know you've done it and don't provide any contact information.

Unless you have a rat-fink neighbor who spills the beans, you can maintain your anonymity practically forever. One or two folks will hear you from time to time; but this is such a specialized hobby, it's unlikely anyone will bother to track you down. They won't know whom to write or email.

They'll still post online, but you can bask in the warm glow of knowing you're radiating, while nobody can interact.

Only downside: you may want to avoid *reading* those message boards, because serious DXers might occasionally remark on what a basker you are.

-*Publicize your beacon, but never actually put it on the air.* This may not yield the same warm glow as emitting a signal, but for some folks, just having good intentions feels as rewarding as doing the actual deed. Give it a whirl. If you go this route, you'll never have to read reception reports at all!

However, a few months later, quietly change your email and home address. Otherwise, someone may eventually write to ask why you're being such a royal basker.

-AG-