

General Announcement regarding the formation of the APRS Working Group (APRS-WG)

As a result of the dialog held among the primary authors of APRS, the APRS Working Group (APRS-WG) is being founded to aid with the development and growth of APRS. What follows is information on the APRS-WG and initial plans for the next eight months. As promised in the initial agreement between the authors this announcement covers the substantive outcomes that have occurred in private on-line discussion and at the in-person meeting held on May 1-2, 1999.

The APRS-WG would like to thank all those involved and the APRS community as a whole for allowing this process to happen in the manner that it did. The results we fell will benefit the APRS community as a whole.

Greg Jones, WD5IVD
for the APRS Working Group

APRS Working Group

Mission Statement

APRS, developed by Bob Bruninga, WB4APR, is an amateur radio digital infrastructure for realtime and tactical digital communications. It is designed to provide communications during emergencies, but it is recognized to support routine round-the-clock global communications as well. Its applications include mapping, messaging, telemetry, and tracking. It uses a standard protocol over RF links, supplemented by alternate communication methodologies.

The APRS Working Group

The APRS Working Group ("Group") is an unincorporated association whose members undertake to further the use and enhance the value of the APRS protocols by (a) maintaining and publishing a formal APRS Protocol Specification; (b) publishing validation tests and other tools to enable compliance with the Specification; (c) supporting an APRS Certification program; and (d) generally working to improve the capabilities of APRS within the amateur radio community. This document describes the organization and operation of the Group. Although the Group may receive support from TAPR or other organizations, it is an independent body and is not affiliated with any organization. The Group will have no budget, collect no dues, and own no assets.

Statement of Principles

At a meeting near Baltimore, Maryland on May 1-2, 1999, and in email communications in the days following, the Group members agreed to the following principles that will govern their behavior and that of the Group:

1. Bob Bruninga has been the primary developer of the APRS concept. He owns the APRSdos computer program, the APRSdos documentation, and the APRS trademark, and retains the right to license these items to others.
2. All Group members agree that in the spirit of Amateur Radio, the on-air protocols themselves should be open to general amateur radio development and not be restricted by copyright.
2. Existing agreements between or among APRS developers are unaffected by this Charter.
3. The Group will formalize the APRS on-air Protocol Specification and publish a definitive APRS protocol document. Present plans are to make the specification in book and diskette form, and possibly to provide it via electronic distribution.
4. A process will be put in place to define how changes to the protocol specification are made, and that process will permit input, review, and comment by the amateur radio public.
5. The Group will put a voluntary APRS certification process in place, to be managed by Bob Bruninga with Group oversight. The process will include a publicly available validation suite.

Protocol Committee

The APRS Protocol Specification is the formal definition of the data elements and message formats used to communicate between APRS devices via wireless or wired (e.g., Internet) connections. It does not include user interface or other elements that do not affect the content or format of these interface components.

The Protocol Committee, which presently consists of all APRS-WG Members, is responsible for the APRS Protocol Specification. It manages the process for publishing and updating the Specification, and for receiving public comment on proposed changes.

The Protocol Committee intends to publish Version 1.0 of the APRS Protocol Specification by the end of October 1999. The first draft of the Specification will be made available to the amateur radio community by the end of June 1999, and comments will be accepted as defined below.

Committee Operations and Community Input

Input from the APRS user community, other APRS developers, and the amateur community at large is a key component of the protocol development process. Once the process has been formally defined it will be announced and published.

Certification Committee

The Group wants to encourage the development of products that properly implement the APRS protocols. To that end, the Certification Committee, which is initially composed of all Group members, will establish a Certification Program. Certification is wholly voluntary on the part of an APRS product developer, and the Certification Program is available on an equal basis to any developer. The full certification process and schedule will be announced and published shortly after Dayton. Some of the points of certification include:

1. The Committee will develop and approve a Validation Suite, which will be the primary basis for Certification. The Suite will consist of test inputs and a description of how a product complying with the Protocol Specification should react to each of these inputs. The suite will be based on the TAPR TNC-2 packet display format. The Validation Suite will be made available to the public without charge.
2. Bob Bruninga will manage the Certification Program on behalf of the Committee, subject to oversight by the Committee.
3. Subject to compliance with a Certification Agreement that must be signed before Certification is granted, Certified Products will be permitted to display or be advertised in conjunction with an "APRS Certified" trademark and logo. The trademark and logo are owned by Bob Bruninga and are licensed subject to the Certification Agreement.
4. Certified Products must successfully complete the Validation Suite, but applicants must acknowledge that additional testing may be necessary to ensure that a given Product properly implements the Protocol Specification, and agree to reasonably cooperate with such testing.
7. The Certification process is largely self-managed. The applicant must run the validation suite and submit results with the application. The Committee will conduct such testing as it deems necessary to verify the Product's conformance to the Protocol Specification.

Full details regarding membership to APRS-WG, meeting and voting process, protocol committee, and the certification process will be made available once the rules have been fully developed.