



Terrible Tower Lessons

This month I am taking a very different approach to this column, and it is warranted. As a community, how many times do we need to touch a hot stove to learn, once and for all, that it burns? You may have been one of the many, as was I, who were stunned and saddened in mid-May to learn that Ben Buettner, DL6RAI, became a Silent Key due to a tower accident. How many more radio amateurs have to die in tower incidents before we learn one critical lesson: there is nothing amateur about towers. There are professionals, both within and outside of the amateur radio community, who are in the business of fully understanding the engineering, physics, and points of potential failure of towers, and the safety contingencies one must implement to stay alive.

A good friend of mine, Noah Gottfried, K2NG, has a commercial tower climbing business. Over the years, any time I heard he was going to be climbing near my home in New Jersey, I would take the day off from work and go to the job site, not as a climber or even as his helper. But if things went sideways and he needed another pair of hands, I'd be there to help. It's what friends do, even when the friends you're supporting are deeply experienced.

What about amateur climbers? The notion, the cultural excuse, that hams are cheap doesn't work when we're talking about towers. Any and every point of failure in a tower job must be contemplated and compensated for — before the job begins. This means investing money and time in a safe and complete job — and yes, safety requires greater investment of both money and time. A tower job is not the time to rush, or cut corners on costs.

Private pilots can suffer from a condition known as "get-there-itis," where they subconsciously put aside or downplay warning signs — along with the associated risks — because they feel they *have* to get where they're going. Sadly, this urge to hurry and "just get there" can result in a crash few walk away from. Do hams suffer from "I'm-only-going-to-itis," where we view a seemingly simple or quick task on a tower as an excuse to take shortcuts — including not getting the equipment, knowledge, or assistance required to ensure a safe job?

How many more hams do we need to learn the terrible tower lessons from? Think about it: How many have died? How many have survived falls, suffering life-altering physical or emotional damage? How many families have been left wondering how this enjoyable pastime could take their loved one away from them?

Putting aside any opinions, bravado, and gritty stubbornness that any of us may be harboring about tower work, I say it's just this simple — if you've got a tower, you have three choices: become an expert and invest the time and money into covering every contingency; hire a professional to do your tower work; or roll the dice and take a chance that nothing will go wrong.

Tower safety is, literally, a deadly serious matter. Ham radio is a very small community. The hams who have been lost in tower accidents were our friends. *You* are our friend. Please, take every measure necessary when doing tower work to ensure your safety and the safety of those around you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David A. Minster', with 'NA2AA' written in a smaller font to the right.

David A. Minster, NA2AA
Chief Executive Officer