

Net Participant's Guide

- **Net Protocols**

- **Legal**

Legal requirements within nets are those of identification and operation on frequencies within the Amateur Radio Bands. The FCC tell us that you **MUST** identify at ten minute intervals during a conversation and in your last transmission. During periods of heavy activity in event nets it is easy to forget when you last identified. *The easiest way to ensure you comply with FCC identification requirements during an event net is to identify with your FCC issued call as you complete an exchange.* This serves two functions: 1) Tells NCS you consider the exchange to be complete without having to use extra words (saves time) 2) Fulfills all FCC identification requirements.

- **Customary**

Customary protocols will normally be used in long standing, non emergency nets. They may include such practices as identifying with the FCC call of both stations on each transmission, giving the FCC call of the next person to talk or many other variations. Please listen to the net before joining. Customary protocols will easily stand out.

- **Tactical Calls**

Tactical calls are used to identify a location during an event regardless of who is operating. This is an important concept. The tactical call allows you to contact a location without knowing the FCC call of the operator there. It also virtually eliminates confusion at shift changes and when a person takes a break from operating. Think about that. Do you answer a call from the sound of a persons voice or from the identified location. Obviously from the identified location.

Tactical calls should be used for all Emergency nets once there are more than three participants and most public service nets if there is more than minimal traffic. Net control will assign the tactical call as each location is opened. It will normally be some unique identifier that indicates which location or function this is.

- **Tactical in, call sign out.** This must be your mantra during directed nets. You use your tactical call to gain access to the net and once you have completed your transaction, use your FCC issued call. Finishing with your call tells NCS you believe you are done and does so without using unnecessary words nor time and also fulfills all FCC identification requirements. If you have not had a tactical call assigned by NCS or the mission coordinator, use the suffix of your call (the letters to the right of the number) as your tactical. If you have a 2 by 1 call, use the number and the ITU phonetic for that suffix letter as your tactical call. For example: WZ0A would say "zero Alpha" for the default tactical call.

- **Some Tactical Call Examples**

- **NET** - for net control

- **FIRE-BASE-1** - for the first fire base established or the fire base in a particular region

- **CHECK-POINT-1** - for the first check point in a public service event

CP - for the incident command post
AID-3 - for the third aid station on a route

- **Proper use of tactical calls**

- **Initiating a call** (Tactical in)

If you were at aid station three during a directed net and wanted to contact Net Control you would say "NET, AID3" or, in crisper nets, simply "AID3". If you had emergency traffic you would say "AID3, emergency traffic" or for priority traffic "AID3, priority traffic". Notice how you have conveyed all information necessary without using any unnecessary words or taking any unnecessary time.

If you had traffic for another location, such as check point five, you would say "AID3, traffic for CHECK POINT 5". This tells NCS everything needed to handle the traffic. NCS will then either call check point 5 with "CHECK POINT 5, call AID3 for traffic", if there is no other traffic holding, or just say "Go ahead." indicating explicit permission to make the call. Notice that there have been no FCC issued calls used. At this point none are necessary.

- **Traffic during a call**

Tactical calls will normally not be used in the contact unless a separate location is mentioned in the message.

- **Completing a call** (Callsign out)

To complete the call from AID3, after the message/traffic is complete you would say "AID3, (your call)". This fulfills your identification requirements and tells NCS that you believe the call to be complete. If the Net Control Station believes the exchange to be complete, and the member station has not identified, then the NCS should say, (completing this example) "AID3, do you have further traffic?" At that point AID3 should either finish with the traffic or identify and clear.

The above is the same for all participants under virtually all traffic examples.

- **Summary** Tactical in - Callsign out.

- **Participating in a net**

- **Enjoy yourself** - Amateur Radio public service is fun!
- **Prepare yourself.** Are your batteries charged? Are you on your best antenna for the frequency/repeater you will be on? Do you have pencil paper and other items you think you will need?
- **Listen.** If you are there at the start of a net or join one in progress, LISTEN for several minutes before you check in. NCS will announce/ask-for what they want.
- **Check into the net in the mode being used by the net.** This should go without saying but we still see people who cannot follow directions.

- **Follow NCS' Instructions.** NCS will ask for specific people/categories-of-people as they are needed. Follow instructions!
- **Slow Down!** Hams, in general, tend to handle communications as quickly as they can. This does NOT produce the maximum thruput during a net. While this may seem counterintuitive, it has been proven again and again that a three or four second break between transmissions will actually result in information being passed more quickly.
- **Do not editorialize.** "This is Phred in the North East portion of the county at 9300 feet where it is snowing, but it was sunny five minutes ago when I came in from feeding the birds, geese and hamsters, but its cold right now and it looks like it could rain in the next day or so - just checking in." is unnecessary and unwanted. This ties up the net and does nothing to add usable information. Check in with your CALL. Add name and other information as requested by NCS.
- **Do not rationalize your actions.** The time for explanations on why you did or did not do something is during the after-action debriefing. Whining about it during the event or incident only wastes time. Let's face it, hearing someone say "Well I thought it might be better if", does nothing to facilitate actual communication.
- **Plan your transmission.** If you have more information than just your Name/Call then jot it down. You can, if necessary, just read your note. This promotes clear concise communication.
- Check in ONLY if you are going to be part of the net. Do NOT check in as "in & out" or "for the count." **You are joining the net or you should only listen.**
- Checking in with "This is" then a pause or unkey followed by the call may work on a few nets, but causes delays and potential problems on most. (Local net option)
- Do not check your friends or family in to a net, unless they are in the room and able to answer were they called by NCS.
- Unless your transmission is longer than ten minutes, you need only identify at the end of the transmission/exchange of information.
- Let NCS know when you leave or if you need to leave early. **Do not go into details of why you need to leave.**
- During an event, if the authorities ask you to move; do so immediately and without comment, then notify the NCS of your change in status as soon as you can.
- If an on-scene authority requests that you shut your radio off, or that you not transmit, **do what they ask immediately and without question.** This is **one** circumstance where you do not notify the NCS of a change in your status. *This deserves a little explanation.* This would normally occur only if there is a presence of explosives or explosive chemicals or vapors, and there is the possibility that a spark producing electronic device is present which might be triggered by an RF Signal.
- If you are concerned with what you can and can not say during a net, please review the "Who talks to the media" in the ECom Basic material.
- Be patient with the NCS. An NCS operator is under high stress. His questions and requests should be clear and crisp; but as he/she begins to tire, there may be a tendency to become rather terse. Typically, there is a whole lot going on at an NCS that the field operators never know about.

Hams are patriotic, independent people and they are volunteers. The attitude among a few hams is that 'Volunteers don't have to take orders.' That's absolutely correct. We don't **have** to take

orders. But **if you are not ready to follow instructions, you may want to do something outside of ECom**

- **Leaving a net**

You will leave a net for one of three reasons:

1. The location is closing

If NCS has given you directions to close the location, simply identify with your FCC issued call, the location tactical call and the word "CLOSED." The NCS will tell you if anything else is needed.

If you are closing the location on orders of the served agency, you will identify with your FCC issued call, location tactical call and the phrase "location CLOSED per (name of person - served agency identification)".

2. You need a break and there is no relief operator

Tell NCS that "I will be away from the radio for (number of minutes)" and end with "Tactical id, (your call)."

3. You have turned the location over to another operator

You will normally not need to tell NCS that you are leaving if this is a regular shift change. However if there are specific instructions from NCS then follow those instructions.

- **Don't over identify**

There is normally nothing that will expend more time, needlessly, than over identification.

Someone that uses their FCC issued call in every transmission is usually a person that is unsure of themselves or, worse yet, someone that is more interested in having their call known to everyone at the event. In the latter situation, help them find work elsewhere. The FCC tells us that you need only identify at ten minute intervals during a conversation (NOT during a net unless you talk for more than ten minutes) and during your last transmission.

End each exchange with your call. That tells everyone that you are of the opinion the exchange is complete and you fulfill all FCC requirements.

- **Write it down**

The easiest way to minimize what you say during a net is to write down everything before you key the microphone. Since very few of us like to write lengthy notes, this will promote brevity. An excellent place to keep this information is in your location log. This serves two purposes: 1) You have a complete log of everything that came from your location 2) It will become very brief.

Roles in a net

- **NCS**

- The NCS is in charge of the net while the net is in session. He/She is responsible for controlling who uses the frequency and when they pass traffic. This needs to be balanced with the fact you will be dealing with volunteers.
- Slow Down! The pace of the net is controlled by the NCS. If you leave three or four seconds between transmissions, you will actually pass more traffic in less time.
- Net Control shall have a commanding signal, i.e. clear, crisp signal with good audio characteristics.

- NCS must keep track of which resources are on the net and who has cleared the channel. NCS is also responsible for knowing what traffic each person is capable of dealing with (sending HF traffic to a Tech. will not work).
- In medium and large operations you need to have a backup NCS and a person to log.
- Keep a written record of the incident and all traffic passed. This does not mean a copy of all formal traffic. Simply an overview of the message.
- Make ALL instructions clear and concise, **using as few words as possible.**
- Use tactical call signs. If participants do not follow your lead, only recognize those using tactical calls (obviously all bets are off if it is emergency traffic).
- Different nets handle different traffic. Should someone try to pass traffic that should be on another net, refer them to the correct net.

- **NCS backup**

There are two types of NCS backups. The first is located in the same room/area as the NCS and acts as relief for the NCS at regular intervals. The second type is a person that maintains a duplicate log of everything happening at the event and is available should there be a failure at the primary NCS location. Whenever there are enough people working an event, an offsite backup NCS should be maintained. This person must be operating with the knowledge and consent of the NCS station and should be known to the entire net.

- **Loggers**

People to handle the keeping of an operational log for the event are a very important to the smooth operation of the event and can be invaluable during emergencies. These people free the NCS from having to split their time/effort down to a level that is neither efficient nor productive. Every net will be enhanced by a good logger.

- **Site communicators**

Site communicators have the responsibility of listening to everything that happens on the net and maintaining contact with the served agency people at the site. They need to produce formal traffic as applicable, maintain a log of activity at their location and be responsive to the needs of their served agency people. *In an emergency, it will be far easier to handle all of the tasks at a location if there are at least two people there.*

- **General communicators**

- Report to the NCS promptly as they become available.
- Ask clearance from NCS before using the frequency.
- Answer PROMPTLY when called by NCS.
- Use tactical call signs.
- Follow established net protocol.

- **Listeners - LISTEN!**

The most helpful listener, during an emergency, is one that listens and stays quiet! NCS does not care that you are there listening unless he asks for assistance from listeners. Normally there will be enough people working the net to handle anything NCS needs. This is even more important if you are not a regular member of the group handling communications.

- **Liaison Stations**

- Liaison stations provide the communication link between two nets. They will generally be

- limited to two nets so they can maintain good communications between the nets.
- Liaison stations will need to have at least two radios, each with their own antenna. These antennas must be separated sufficiently to NOT interfere with the other radio when the operator transmits on either frequency.
- Liaison stations will be appointed by NCS or the staffing officer, usually from trained operators.

ICS Duties for ECom

The following instructions apply to all ECom operators!

Everyone **MUST** ensure that all assignments, delegation and hand-overs are done with **explicit** statement of intent and **explicit** statement of acceptance. The most likely problems will occur when duties are assigned/accepted implicitly. If ALL assignment, delegation, handovers, acceptance etc. are explicit, the potential mis-understandings are minimized or eliminated.

A good technique to ensure understanding is to repeat what you understand the order or instruction to be. This will expose errors before they can become a problem.

Event Check List

The following are **YOUR** responsibilities for every emergency and many exercise events. Remember that during an emergency you will either be part of the solution, or you will become part of the problem.

1. **Before you leave your house**, you should:
 1. Review your assignment to ensure you understand what is expected of you for this specific assignment.
 - Incident type, name and designation
 - Incident check in location
 - Reporting time
 - Anticipated length of stay
 - Travel instructions
 2. Update your "go-bag" with needed items not normally stored there
 3. Prepare clothing and food, sufficient to handle the anticipated length of stay at your assignment.
 4. Review communication procedures as necessary
 5. Ensure that your family knows how to contact you while you are at the assignment.
 6. Review transportation requirements - to and from the assignment
2. **On departure from your house**, check in with the staffing net to let them know you are in route to your assignment.
3. **On arrival:**
 1. Check in at the staging area so the served agency records reflect your help.
 2. Determine where/when the event briefing will be (ASK!)
 3. Notify the staffing net that you are going to the operations frequency.

4. Check in with operations NCS to let them know you are available.

4. Perform the duties assigned in a manner consistent with good safety procedures and good Ham techniques.

This will include:

- Monitor work progress.
- Provide your supervisor with appropriate status updates and notification of any problems that may arise.
- Keep a good log of your station activities!

5. Once your assignment is complete AND **prior to departing** you need to:

1. Complete your work assignment
2. Brief your subordinates on demobilization
3. Complete event paper work
4. Brief your replacement as applicable
5. Follow incident check out procedures. This means:
 - Check out where you checked in (if at all possible)
 - Notify Operations NCS of your departure
 - Notify the Staffing Net you are checking out from your assignment and going home.

6. **Upon arrival at your house**, check out with the staffing net.

This ensures the event staff have full accounting of your safety and location while you work any event.

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