

Basic Rules for Emergency Operations

Ron Dodson, KA4MAP

KERR ARTICLE IV

Section 4.1 BASIC RULES OF EMERGENCY OPERATION

DO NOT act on your own to provide emergency communication. We must remember that we are to ASSIST the various served agencies only when called for. An unorganized, knee-jerk reaction to an emergency situation will create problems and damage our good will. If you suspect that a potential emergency situation exists that would require amateur radio communication, please monitor the various assigned net frequencies for your area. If you suspect we may be needed, notify your local Emergency Coordinator or Assistant EC.

When a served agency needs our assistance, they usually alert designated amateur radio operators who are members of the Amateur Radio Emergency Service. Typically, this is the local Emergency Coordinator who has registered himself and other amateurs IN ADVANCE with the agencies seeking help. Once called in by the served agency, the EC (or designated amateur) should notify the District Emergency Coordinator. The DEC will then notify the Section Emergency Coordinator, who in turn will notify the Section Manager. Use only enough operators to get the situation under control.

Activation of nets in "Stand By Mode" to check on availability of amateurs in anticipation of a response is always a judgment call and can sometimes be worthwhile. Care should be exercised that no one "jumps the gun" and confuses the situation.

The EC will normally assign an NCS for control of the local net, which is to be designated as the "key station." This station will be used extensively during a communications emergency. Key station personnel should have full use of emergency power capability with adequate relief operators assigned to ensure continuous operation. When an officially activated emergency net is in session, the NET CONTROL IS THE BOSS. Discipline is essential if operations are to go smoothly. DO NOT TALK unless specifically asked to do so.

If the emergency should cover more than the local area, the EC in charge may, at his/her option, ask for activation of additional traffic nets on a District or Section-wide basis. He will assign liaison stations to and from these nets.

All messages must be written traffic in standard ARRL form. It is HIGHLY RECOMMENDED that anyone taking emergency traffic should use the "emergency radiogram" format similar to the ARRL form FSD-244 which is intended for (H)ealth and (W)elfare traffic that is enclosed as a sample at the end of this chapter. This will give you a written, signed, and dated record of emergency traffic passed. This is invaluable as an audit trail and for later critique sessions.

In making this statement we realize that there will be verbal communications, which are not RADIOGRAMS! It is ridiculous to even consider the need for a radiogram to advise of a tornado on the ground or funnel cloud sightings etc. during Skywarn and other situations. Our reasoning in the KERR statement is based on the idea that if a Mayor, County Judge Exec. etc asks that an important message be transmitted it is worthwhile for the served agency AND YOU to have a written record of the message and its origin, destination and content. Radiograms are the quick way to accomplish this.

All emergency and priority messages must be SIGNED by the official who originates them, with their title, taking responsibility for their contents. Message precedence of (E)mergency, (P)riority, (W)elfare or (R)outine shall be used on ALL messages. The filing time of (E)mergency and (P)riority traffic is important and must be shown.

During formal nets in disasters, stations do not transmit unless invited to do so by the net control. The ONLY exception to this is for a station having EMERGENCY traffic.

When the emergency is over, the Emergency Coordinator, or the amateur in charge, MUST file a report with the District Emergency Coordinator. The report should include a description of the traffic

handled, duration of the net, participants, and agencies served. This will be invaluable during a critique session.

An emergency situation may take many forms. This could include minor communications assistance to local Police Authorities in assisting with traffic or crowd control to serving one or more agencies in a major statewide disaster such as a chemical spill or earthquake. If the disaster is major and no firm links to the outside have been established, every effort will be made to get an aircraft over the affected area with an amateur radio operator aboard monitoring 146.550 MHz simplex.

Likewise, the emergency may be confined to an area of a few hundred feet to several counties. ARES members must be able to respond to these situations in a timely and efficient manner.

Should an emergency situation arise which may require the assistance of Kentucky ARES members, the following must be kept in mind:

1. In most situations, the affected area will be local in nature, confined to a local community or part of a community. For local communications to be effective, each EC in the area is encouraged to establish a working relationship with served agencies in the area particularly the local DEM official.
2. In all instances, ARES personnel should not begin to assist unless called upon by an official of the Served Agency, unless the EC and the served official have worked out specific other arrangements on a broader basis. It is hoped that the local EC has made prior efforts to see to it that the Served Agencies are aware of what radio amateurs can provide. In all instances, it is assumed that the official of the Served Agency will contact the local EC to request assistance.
3. Once the local EC has received the call for assistance, he should begin notifying his ARES registered amateurs of the situation. He should also notify the District Emergency Coordinator, or in his absence, the Section Emergency Coordinator of the situation
4. In the case of a local emergency, the EC should begin call-up procedures for emergency net activation on the local emergency frequency. This is usually accomplished via a repeater to provide for a wide area coverage, however a simplex two meter frequency would suffice if coverage is adequate. Once the net is activated, the EC or his appointed control operator will act as net control for as long as necessary. The NCS should make every effort to see that emergency traffic is handled in the most efficient manner as possible. A listing of all traffic, check-ins (especially mobile) and agencies served should be recorded. For additional information, refer to the ARRL Emergency Coordinator's Manual.
5. UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES will traffic be accepted addressed to the Governor. The Executive Director of DEM is designated by the Governor to handle such matters, and is the highest State Official to whom traffic may be addressed.
6. In order of priority, requests from Division of Emergency Management shall be answered first, followed by the Red Cross, then other agencies as is necessary. Red Cross has it's State Headquarters in Louisville, and will most likely receive primary communication support from members of the ARTS Amateur Radio Club, followed by other clubs in the area.
7. Health and Welfare traffic will likely, NOT be accepted for several hours, due to the inability to handle such traffic. In a major emergency, the emphasis will be on handling true emergency traffic, which provides immediate relief from suffering and saving lives.
8. The use of Tactical callsigns during an emergency should provide some indication of the station's operating location. Stations operating for example from Boone Emergency Operations Center should use "Boone Center" and stations operating in the Fayette County EOC should identify themselves as "Fayette EOC". Identification is a requirement of the FCC. Stations must give complete station identification at least once in a 10-minute operating period, particularly when tactical calls are being used.
9. Under no circumstances will any ARES appointee attempt to provide support communications for any agency until instructed do so by the agency officials.
10. The use of any Q signals, (QSL, QSY etc) during and emergency operation will not be used on phone nets. These signals were developed for CW nets in order to speed and simplify net

operations. When used on phone they have the potential to be misunderstood. Additionally, the use of such signals on phone is considered poor operating technique.

11. The common use of "Break" and " Break-Break" to indicate an emergency shall not be used. It has no universally understood meaning. The word "EMERGENCY" will be used on phone to announce information of life or death importance. The standard CW signal is SOS sent as one character- not 3 spaced letters.
12. NEVER MAKE ANY COMMENT TO A MEMBER OF THE MEDIA!!! That is the job of the Public Information Officer. "I CAN'T ANSWER THAT QUESTION." is always a good answer. Refer them to the PIO. Media personnel are trained to be very convincing and are very clever at getting you to say something. What they will always be looking for will be information regarding injuries, deaths, addresses of the most severe damage, license numbers of vehicles, rail car numbers, and possible reported causes which might lead them to a trail-of-responsibility/blame” This type information is confidential and is to be passed only by more secure means, i.e.packet or courier, which they cannot access by scanner. If you don't recognize a person as someone you absolutely know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, to be part of the authorized on-site operations team, don't discuss the situation with them!
13. Should you ever find yourself in a situation where you have found a dead body, or body parts, DO NOT report this to the NCS. Request only that the NCS send the appropriate authorities and help to your location on a priority basis. If the NCS should happen to ask for more details, refuse to give them and repeat your request. A smart and trained NCS operator will catch on quickly. In the case of a discovered injury or body entrapment, notify the NCS immediately, but NEVER TRANSMIT THE NAME OF AN INJURED, TRAPPED OR DECEASED SUBJECT.
14. NEVER leave your post or the person you have been assigned to "Shadow" without notifying the NCS. If the authorities ask you to move, do so immediately and without comment; but notify the NCS of your change in status as soon as you can.

Remember: We are communicators. We do not make decisions about anything for the authorities. They (our served agencies) are in charge, not us. It is not your call to decide that more fire engines are needed, or that an emergency generator is needed somewhere. Your only job is to communicate, when asked to do so, what the authorities want communicated. They do not have to use you at all; and many times they won't. Do not insist that they do. You are there to provide them with an extra way for them to pass information when their communications systems either fail or become overloaded. Tell them you are available for service when needed and back off. Speak only when spoken to, stay visible and pay attention. Nothing can be more embarrassing than to "lose" the person you are supposed to shadow. (Don't laugh... It has happened!)

It may be quicker and more efficient to hand your microphone to the person who wishes to pass a message than to try and relay it yourself. Don't be afraid to let the authorities operate as third parties. Just hand them the mic and tell them they can't use foul language. Relays often become incorrectly "translated" by the relay operator, especially if there is a high percentage of special agency terminology, technical terms or jargon that you do not really understand.

If an on-scene authority requests that you shut your radio off, or that you not transmit, please do what they ask without question. Normally, they will tell you why, but they don't have to. 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 like blasting caps, smoke detectors, receivers, telephones, etc., which might be triggered by an RF Signal.