

Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES)

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RACES (Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service) nets are a bit different.

1. They are federally sponsored by FEMA and can only be activated by governmental official. This appointed or elected official can be at a local, State, or Federal level. It is usually a County Emergency Manager, Sheriff or the State Police.
2. A RACES net, under current law, can only have RACES membership. An operator must be RACES qualified in order to participate. To become qualified, some operators must take a simple, short course of instruction available from FEMA. The text for the course and the open book test are now available on the Internet; from FEMA. You can take the test interactively on the Internet. Contact your EC or RO (FEMA Radio Officer) for further information. Your EC/RO will guide you through the simple RACES application process
3. As a general rule of thumb, during a RACES net, you cannot communicate with a non-RACES station. This is a topic of considerable debate. Some individuals and groups claim an interpretation of the rules that allows communication with non-RACES stations. This is predicated on permission being granted by a government official for such communications. We will not debate this in this material. The following is a direct quote from the part 97 FCC rules. We will let you decide.

"Subpart E - Providing Emergency Communications

97.407 (c) A RACES station may only communicate with:

1. Another RACES station;
2. An amateur station registered with a civil defense organization;
3. A United States Government station authorized by the responsible agency to communicate with RACES stations;
4. A station in a service regulated by the FCC whenever such communication is authorized by the FCC.

(d) An amateur station registered with a civil defense organization may only communicate with:

1. A RACES station licensed to another civil defense organization with which the amateur station is registered;
2. The following stations upon authorization of the responsible civil defense official for the organization with which the amateur station is registered:
 - (i) A RACES station licensed to another civil defense organization;
 - (ii) An amateur station registered with the same or another civil defense organization;
 - (iii) A United States Government station authorized by the responsible agency to communicate with RACES stations; and

(iv) A station in a service regulated by the FCC whenever such communication is authorized by the FCC.

(e) All communications transmitted in RACES must be specifically authorized by the civil defense organization for the area served.

Only civil defense communications of the following types may be transmitted:

1. Messages concerning impending or actual conditions jeopardizing the public safety, or affecting the national defense or security during periods of local, regional, or national civil emergencies;
2. Messages directly concerning the immediate safety of life of individuals, the immediate protection of property, maintenance of law and order, alleviation of human suffering and need, and the combating of armed attack or sabotage;
3. Messages directly concerning the accumulation and dissemination of public information or instructions to the civilian population essential to the activities of the civil defense organization or other authorized governmental or relief agencies; and
4. Communications for RACES training drills and tests necessary to ensure the establishment and maintenance of orderly and efficient operation of the RACES as ordered by the responsible civil defense organizations served. Such drills and tests may not exceed a total time of 1 hour per week. With the approval of the chief officer for emergency planning the applicable State, Commonwealth, District or territory, however, such tests and drills may be conducted for a period not to exceed 72 hours no more than twice in any calendar year." These are always directed nets; requiring fairly tight net discipline.
5. The Net Control Station is nearly always located in a pre-designated Emergency Operations Center (EOC). If the EOC is ill equipped, put your NCS somewhere else. Expect to deal with a number of agencies and manage communications liaisons with most of them. NCS operators will normally be reporting directly to the EC/RO. Note: (If an EOC is poorly equipped, the EC should work closely and creatively with the local Emergency Manager to solve this problem.)
6. RACES NCS operators and net participants should be familiar with the Incident Command System (ICS).
7. Participants in RACES activities are covered by their State's Disability/Workman's Compensation Structure. Recent changes in Federal law also gives participants increased, but limited, liability protection against the possibility of being sued for actions they might take as emergency volunteers.
8. A RACES training net is currently limited by law, to one hour of airtime per month. A RACES training net may be called or initiated by the RO.

Note: Participation in RACES operations can involve taking direct orders from public service agencies and governmental officials. If you are steadfast in your belief that you are a volunteer, and that volunteers don't have to take orders, the

author suggests that you think long and hard before becoming involved with RACES.

When you sign a RACES application, you are basically signing a contract with the government and agreeing to do what you are told, during a RACES controlled event.

Standby nets are one of the most often used and most useful tools available to the amateur radio community. They can be started in open or directed format. They can be started and run by anyone and offer an excellent opportunity for NCO trainees to become exposed to running an actual, "almost emergency" net.

The standby net allows a monitoring, qualified NCO to get organized and get into the flow of the event, without having to actually run the net. It also gives the trainee an on-line coach to fall back on for advice. When the qualified NCO feels that it is necessary to take over the net because of escalating circumstances or the inability of the trainee to continue efficiently, the transfer is seamless.

Big events, usually under RACES, are most often run using the Incident Command System. The ICS uses a different form of a standby net. It is called a Resource Net. These nets are always directed and it's no place for a rookie. They are literally "collection point" or "staging area" nets where excess personnel, relief schedules, lists of equipment, lists of supplies, etc. are kept in some semblance of order.

This is the "Supply Sergeant" of a big event. This is also the net that participants check into when they become available to work the event. The resource net control makes assignments, gives instructions, and directs the flow of available resources. The Resource NCS receives requests for transportation, equipment, supplies and personnel from a front-line Tactical Net, the Command Net, and outside served agencies.

You need experience, outstanding organizational skills, a cool head, and several assistants to be an effective NCO for a major ICS agency net. While we should train for this position in the event that we could be called on, a professional dispatcher normally handles it, with the amateur NCS filling in the communications "holes".

The amateur radio participation level in big disasters, like hurricanes, may be large enough that it will require it's own Resource Net. These nets have extreme value in smoothing out the flow of communications, personnel, and equipment. They simplify the operation and drastically reduce the stress level for tactical and command NCO's.

Tactical nets are used after an event has occurred or during and after a lengthy event. They are found on the "front lines" of response, disaster assessment, recovery and Search and Rescue operations. There may be several of these nets running at the same time; on different frequencies and from widespread locations...all reporting to a "master" Tactical NCS at the EOC.

Stress safety to your people. Recovery operations are very dangerous. Everyone is excited, in a hurry, confused, and in an unnatural situation, a dangerous combination. It is very easy to step on a nail and become another casualty.

Command Nets are encountered in all large disasters or emergencies. This is a communications net established to keep the top "executive board" of emergency officials informed. They are also used by fire departments and police agencies during smaller, local events. They are run in accordance with the Incident Command System, (ICS). It would be rare for amateurs to be involved directly in one of these nets, but fairly common for amateur nets and sub-nets to be reporting certain information to a command net. For now, just be aware that they exist and that they are the guys who are really running the show.

Source: Kentucky Amateur Radio Web Site – www.kyham.net