The Wisconsin ARES/RACES
Emergency Coordinator

FLASH! 2nd Annual EC Conference, 2 December

Mark your calendars now! The Second Annual Emergency Coordinator Conference is set for Saturday, 2 December. It will again be hosted at Wisconsin Emergency Management Headquarters, 2400 Wright Street, Madison, beginning at 10:00 a.m. and ending no later than 3:30 p.m. This year we will meet in the Emergency Operations Center, the large room used by state agencies and officials in case of a widespread emergency. A box lunch will be served at noon.

The agenda is still being finalized, but we know for sure that speakers will include Don Michalski, W9IXG, our ARRL Section Manager, and Alan Wohlferd, Wisconsin Emergency Management Communications and Warning Officer). Your SEC will also present a session on the new VECS Plan.

Other speakers will be announced in the next newsletter.

As was true last year, the conference is open to ECs, AECs, EMs and all hams and non-hams that have an interest in RACES, ARES, Emergency Management and emergency communications in general.

The only cost associated with the meeting is for the box lunch – payable when you arrive. However, it is imperative that you pre-register so that we can order the lunches (Stan will pre-pay for them). The box lunch on-site is preferable so we can sit around and talk shop while we eat, rather than taking time to travel to and from some local eatery. Our caterer has given us a deadline of 20 November to place the order so you must snailmail or email your registration to arrive no later than 8:00 a.m. on 20 November. Email the names, calls and positions (EC, AEC, etc.) of all in your group who plan to attend, along with their preference for box lunches from the list below to Mack Brophy at

races@dma.state.wi.us

Alternatively, you can snailmail your registration:

Mack Brophy, N9NTB
Wisconsin State Hamshack Manager
Wisconsin Emergency Management
2400 Wright Street
Madison, WI 53707-7865

Again, your registration MUST be received by 8:00 a.m. on Monday, November 20.

Box lunch preferences (cost $7.50):

CHOOSE ONE SUB STYLE:

1.   Italian Sub
2.   Turkey and cheddar sub
3.   Roast beef and cheddar sub
4.   Veggie sub

CHOOSE ONE SALAD STYLE (each ½pint):

1.   Dill/crab salad
2.   Pasta salad (cheese tortellini)
3.   Potato Salad

All lunches include Turtle Cheesecake and utensils. Drinks will be available in vending machines. See you there!

Damage Assessment Training in the Land of OZ

The August meeting of OZARES (Ozaukee County ARES/RACES found the membership taking a course on Introduction to Damage Assessment, presented by Ozaukee County Emergency Manager Bill Stolte (N9VBJ). That evening provided the hams with a good classroom grounding in the theory of initial damage assessment.   Then, at the next meeting (28 September), a practical exercise was held.   Zip tied to railings in the Justice Center's parking lot were laminated 8 x 10-inch photos of actual damage during past tornadoes in Manitowoc County (St. Nazianz) and Ozaukee County. It was dusk, and the members had to use flashlights to examine the photos, thus simulating possible actual conditions during the real thing. Teams examined each of the two dozen photos and used actual damage assessment forms to record their findings – Minor Damage, Major Damage or Destroyed. When finished, the teams returned to the classroom, to compare their findings with actual assessments of the same buildings generated after the real incidents. They did very well, indeed, and most estimates were right on the money when compared with the real thing.   Those few instances where an OZARES assessment was off the mark a bit did so only because the photos provided less information than a walk-around of the actual site.

This training was not given because it is expected that OZARES hams would become damage assessors during a real incident (though, in a pinch, they could easily do the job after this training). Rather, the hams would likely serve as communicators for each of the damage assessment teams sent out into the field. Now OZARES hams will be communicators that are even more valuable because they are fully aware of the focus of the damage assessment teams. Incidentally, your SEC served in exactly this role during the major flooding that occurred in Ozaukee County a few years ago. My team consisted of three persons beside me as communicator – one representative each from county, state and federal government. Our particular team was assigned to survey damage to roads, bridges and public buildings in the county.

This illustrates the kind of interesting and useful training that can be arranged when ARES/RACES groups work closely with their county Emergency Management office. While certainly non-traditional training for hams, there is no question that it does prepare Amateur Radio operators to function as valuable members of the response and recovery teams. Kudos are due to those who designed the training: Bill Stolte, EC Abe Galonski (KC1W) and AEC for Training Jack Morrison (N9SFG).   Nice work guys!

The Enclosed Survey

Enclosed in the envelope with this mailing is a single page survey of ARES/RACES groups in the state. It is designed to answer some questions that cannot be obtained by any other means. ECs, please take the two or three minutes necessary to fill this out and get it back to me. You should be able to do it all "off the top of your head".

Let me remind you all that I do not push for the monthly EC reports that are required in many states so please cooperate on those rare occasions such as this when I do ask for a report. I will collate the information and publish a summary here … no information will be published that identifies individual groups. Thanks for your help!!!

Net Nutz

By Dennis Rybicke, K9LGU
Section Traffic Manager, Wisconsin Section

[Again, thanks to Denny for letting us reprint the "preamble" to his September STM Report.]

Who needs it? Why should we bother to fight the static crashes, the QSB, to accomplish the thankless task of relaying messages that appear to be of little or no consequence? Why should we offer to send messages for friends, work on our traffic-handling skills, or check into nets on a regular basis even though there may not be any traffic coming our way?

Today, there is the Internet, Email, cell phones, and easy access to long-distance. With the decline in interest in CW operation, there has also been a decline in interest in nets operation and traffic handling.   New operators enjoy DX, FM repeaters, PSK31, and plenty of other aspects of the hobby, but section traffic nets struggle for outlets. Some states have eliminated some nets. Some sections are not represented on NTS Area nets. So, why bother? Why not let traffic handling die a normal death and just enjoy the other parts of Ham radio? Who needs it?

We do. We need the service component of traffic handling just as we need to support public service events with our local repeaters. We need the practice, the training, for getting the message through -- even under adverse conditions. We need to demonstrate that we can provide accurate and timely communications -- even when the Internet is tied up,

when the telephone lines are down, when the location of an emergency is not within easy cellular coverage. Traffic handling is an integral part of the emergency services we can provide.

So what should we do? Should we just let a few net nuts carry the load? Should we forget to tell new hams of the fun and value in traffic handling? Should we eliminate our section nets, or should we encourage participation at our local club meetings and licensing classes?

Maybe you are not able to check in to some of the section nets – but if the weather net is too early, the noon net might be just right. If you can't have your traffic going out of state ready for daytime 9RN, you can send it to WIN from the evening sideband net (WSBN) or check into the WNN, WSSN, or WIN/E yourself. Up late? Why not stop by at the late session of WIN at 10 p.m. to check for traffic and say good night?

Traffic handling. Who needs it? We do.

Winnebago's 8 October State-Wide SET

By Dan Lenz, KB9IME, EC, Winnebago (S)

[When Dan was setting up his annual Simulated Emergency Test, he used email to invite other counties to participate. Well, he created a benevolent monster! Forty-two percent of Wisconsin's 72 counties worked with Winnebago during the event! This seems ample evidence that we are ready for an annual statewide SET. Look for plans for it early next fall. Meanwhile, here is Dan's preliminary report.]

The purpose of Winnebago's SET was:

1. Some hams have little or no experience in checking into nets or handling traffic because of restricted operating privileges. The SET was aimed at giving these hams a chance to gain experience.

2. Our SET was designed to test our communications links, statewide communications links, and to energize the emergency communications community to plan and design future SETS.

3. It was also designed to identify strengths and weaknesses in our own ARES/RACES team.

Early in the design, I asked the WEM Hamshack for participation. Unfortunately, it turned out that all of their personnel would be out of town during the date of our SET. Therefore, to keep the exercise scope in a wide area rather than just in our own county, I invited other counties to help by sending us traffic. The response was overwhelming!

We had check-ins from 30 counties during the exercise, and handled over 60 pieces of traffic. This gave many of my new hams a chance to deal with simulated emergency traffic – a most important activity in disaster communications. As was the goal, the SET did reveal some shortcomings.

We encountered problems with responding to and routing voice traffic. A major cause was forgotten equipment, including something so simple as EARPHONES. We learned you cannot effectively run three voice nets in one room without phones. Another problem arose when operators passed traffic too fast. All ops have to remember that the person on the other end must write the message out, and this is a slow process unless they use shorthand.

Another set of problems arose with packet traffic. Some problems were due to new and unfamiliar TNCs and software, and inexperienced operators. However, a wide-area problem was also identified. If I am correct, it seems that we have only a few crossover packet nodes that go from standard net nodes to the AR nodes. This causes big problems with stations connecting to AR nodes. Node access to the north is limited and AR node access to the north does not exist, insofar as I am aware. For example, my link to ARGLK from standard net nodes is WIAPL to WIWAUP to WISP to ARGLK. While I can change frequencies and go direct to ARGLK, not every ham has that opportunity. I see a need to put our heads together on this issue.

We identified and tabulated all these problems, and discussed each one thoroughly during our After Action Review (AAR) at dinner, served in our new Remote Operating Center. Now that we know what our local problems are, it is a relatively easy fix to put in procedures to solve them.

I was disappointed that no REACT folks showed up during the SET, though I did contact them. I think that we in ARES must make an effort to include them, for it will make both ARES and REACT stronger and more able to supply smooth emergency communications support. Along these lines, I would also like to see more involvement by MARS, even though their folks cannot use MARS calls on the ham bands. At the very least, we should identify them in our EC emergency plans at some level.

In summary, the SET served its purpose as stated above. I hope it spurred thoughts concerning future SETS covering the entire state. I hope it gave other ECs a chance to review and refine their emergency plans as it did for me. A more complete After Action Report (AAR) will follow in a few days by email, or snailmail to those not on the web.

Training for Net Participation and Associated Emergency Operations

By R. Bruce Winchell, N8UT   © 1997

[This is the beginning of a long, but important document which each EC should read. Abbreviated and tailored for local use, it would make a good inclusion in your local emergency plan. To be continued next month.]

The purpose of this document is to provide some basic rules that apply to ALL "Declared " or "Directed" voice or "phone"nets. Some of these rules, (1, 2, &3) will apply to any net; in any mode. Mixed in with the nuts and bolts of net activity, you will find some basic rules of conduct with which you must be familiar. They are every bit as important, if not more so, than your ability to run your radio. If your conduct is out of line, you can absolutely destroy hard-won relationships that have taken years to build with our served agencies.

A "declared" net is defined as any net that begins with a statement from an operator that a net is being started for a particular purpose, and that someone is assuming duties as Net Control Station (NCS). Declared nets can take many different formats and styles.

OPEN NET FORMAT: This type of declared net can be nearly invisible. A group has declared a net to be active, but not much is happening. The repeater or frequency is being used normally. The net is transparent and running in the background. A typical use for this type net is during the early stages of weather watches. Operators are occasionally reporting some weather condition to an informal NCS. Other than that, the rag chewing is proceeding normally.

DIRECTED NET FORMAT: There are two basic types of directed nets: Formal and Informal. Informal Directed Nets are your normal Tuesday night club net, Elmer's Net, CW practice net, ARES teaching net, Public Service Events, etc. Formal Directed Nets include ACTIVATION of ARES/RACES personnel for Fire Nets, SKYWARN, earthquakes, or other emergency activations. In either case, the NCS declares the net to be active and actively controls the frequency. A specific topic, conditions, and/or set of instructions for check-in may be given. Normal usage of the frequency is stopped.

Net Control Stations can quickly become overwhelmed by rapidly accumulating administrative and logistical requirements. As the scope of an operation grows, the Main (Command) NCS may activate one or more supporting sub-nets to handle these duties. This reduces the traffic flow to, and maintains the efficiency of, the main net. These sub-nets operate independent of the main net and have their own NCS. They report and respond to the main net. Some typical names for these sub-nets are: Resource (personnel, standby, relief, scheduling), Logistics (supply, transportation), Health & Welfare, Search & Rescue, Damage Assessment, ARESMAT, and Security.

GENERAL RULES OF OPERATION:

1. The Net Control Station has ABSOLUTE CONTROL of the frequency until the net is closed.

2. All communications must pass through the authority of the NCS for the duration of the net. If you wish to speak with another station involved in the net, ask NCS for permission to "go direct." Make sure it is important and relevant to the net activity. Personal transmissions are inappropriate.

3. During any net, but of particular importance in Emergency Nets, the NCS may give check-in instructions, requesting information he/she wants as part of your check-in to the net. If no special instructions are given for an emergency net, give NCS the following: Call sign (ALWAYS PHONETICALLY), Name, Mobile or Base?, RACES qualified?, Available for how long?, band/equipment availability and condition of your radio power source.

4. If the NCS announces that all operators should check-in to a "Resource" net, you should follow those instructions. If this occurs, you will know that the NCS is in a Tactical or Command Operations mode and is very busy. Do not attempt to check-in with that NCS. Go to the requested frequency and check-in with the NCS there. Stay on the Resource net frequency. A Resource Net is a holding area where you will stay until given an assignment. When you receive your assignment from the Resource NCS, follow his instructions exactly. Listen carefully. The instructions may have a direct bearing on your personal safety and they may change during the course of the net.

5. Once you have "checked in" (joined the net), you should NEVER leave the assigned frequency or your transmitter without telling the NCS unless you are in immediate danger.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT MONTH