



# The Wisconsin ARES/RACES Emergency Coordinator



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## WISCONSIN SECTION EMERGENCY COORDINATOR, CHIEF RACES RADIO OFFICER AND EDITOR:

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The WEC Newsletter is sent monthly to all American Radio Relay League Emergency Coordinators in the State of Wisconsin. It intended to provide a forum for ECs to share ideas concerning the organization and training of their respective groups, and as a source of news concerning ARES and RACES activities in the state.

Comments, suggestions and articles (finished or in rough form) are solicited from the readers.

This newsletter and other important documents are posted on the Wisconsin ARES/RACES web page at:

<http://www.execpc.com/~skaplan>

in PDF format, shortly after each issue is published.

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## Just a Few More Days Until the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual EC Conference

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. There has been a change since the last notice – we will be able to meet in the Auditorium. 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](mailto:races@dma.state.wi.us)

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 1/2 pint):

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.

The agenda will start promptly at 10:00. Here is the line up:

10:00 Welcome. Stan Kaplan, WB9RQR, SEC.

10:05 Alan Wohlferd, Wisconsin Emergency Management Communications and Training Officer, will provide comments concerning RACES. Al has direct responsibility for the RACES program in WEM for the State of Wisconsin.

10:20 Don Michalski, W9IXG, will give us a sneak preview of the new Emergency Communications Program, a part of the also-new ARRL Continuing Education Program. None of this has yet been announced by the ARRL, so you will be among the first to hear about it! Don is the ARRL Section Manager – responsible for all ARRL activities in the state.

10:35 WB9RQR will provide an overview and some specific comments on the new Volunteer

Emergency Communications Support (VECS) Plan. Printed copies of the plan will be available in case you have not received one.

11:00 Break.

11:15 Abe Galonski, KC1W, EC for Ozaukee County, will provide a profile of OZARES – Ozaukee County's ARES/RACES group. This will be the first profile of a county group, with a new one planned for each subsequent EC Conference, as a means for ECs to see what is going on in other groups in the state.

11:45 Sam Rowe, KG9NG, will provide an overview of the Wisconsin Hamshack capabilities. Sam is EC of Dane County, Assistant SEC, and Deputy State Radio Officer. He and his ARES group have responsibility for staffing the hamshack, which is located just a few feet from our meeting site. The hamshack will be open for tours during the lunch hour (hosted by Wisconsin Hamshack Manager Mack Brophy, N9NTB).

12:00 Lunch in the EOC. Make an effort to sit with someone you do not know!

1:00 Ray Meyer, N9PBY, will present an overview of the Packet Network in Wisconsin. This is your chance to see why you have ease or difficulty in sending packet messages to various sites in the state, including the State Hamshack. Ray is a packet guru and has agreed to sub for Len Kreyer, N9QIP, EC for ARES Packet, who cannot make the meeting this year. Ray is also a website guru; he maintains the ARES/RACES website for us.

2:00 TABLETOP EXERCISE. The exercise was designed by Captain Jack Morrison, N9SFG, AEC for Training in Ozaukee County and Captain of the county's 42 foot Rescue Boat. Jack has had wide experience in designing and participating in exercises, and has tailored this one to our specific needs. The Facilitator (Exercise Director) will be William Stolte, N9VBJ. Bill is the Emergency Manager for Ozaukee County and one of the few EMs in the state to hold Level 4 Certification.

As is the case for all such exercises, the details are kept secret from all potential participants until it begins. Even your SEC does not know what is in store for us, other than the scenario involves multiple counties. However, you can bet that Bill and Jack will provide an interesting and useful exercise. This kind of activity often reveals both strengths and weaknesses that otherwise surface only during a real emergency.

We will adjourn shortly after the exercise, which is expected to terminate at about 3:00 p.m. See you there!

## Training for Net Participation and Associated Emergency Operations

By R. Bruce Winchell, N8UT © 1997

[Continued from last month. Tailored for local use, it would make a good inclusion in your local emergency plan.]

GENERAL RULES OF OPERATION: (Cont'd)

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.

6. If the net is called for any emergency or semi-emergency purpose, you may be issued a tactical call sign by the NCS. Normally, only KEY stations, with a special function, will be assigned a tactical call sign. If you are assigned a tactical call sign, use it as much as possible. You are still obligated to use your FCC issued call sign to ID every 10 minutes. If the NCS senses that there is going to be a lull in the action, he/she may call for all operators to ID. In emergency nets, do not interrupt the flow of emergency traffic just to ID. Just fit it into your next transmission. Example: "Net, . . . KA8AAA as Fire One. . . . "

7. In emergency nets, keep all your transmissions short and to the point. Think about what you are going to say before you transmit. Rule: Think it, Say it, Get off the key!! Do not rag chew . . . even a little bit.

8. LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN - Pay attention to everything that is going on!! Failure to do so could endanger your life!! If a situation escalates, you may be asked to assume a larger role . . . maybe take over a sub-net? If you have not been keeping track of the situation, you will not be very effective.

9. If the NCS requests that you join a sub-net on another frequency, report and check-in to that net as quickly as possible and STAY on the sub-net frequency! DO NOT switch back and forth between nets! It may not be as "exciting" on a sub-net, but there is a very definite reason why you were asked to go to work there . . . they are going to need your help!

10. Reporters will be everywhere that there might be a tidbit of unique information about any incident or event. This is especially true if you are working a front-line disaster field site. 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 do not recognize a person as someone you absolutely know, beyond any doubt, to be part of the authorized on-site operations team, do not discuss the situation with them!

11. 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.

12. 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.

13. Remember: We are communicators. We do not make decisions about anything for the authorities. They 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 will not. 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.

14. It may be quicker and more efficient to hand your microphone to the person who wishes to pass a message than to try to relay it yourself. Do not be afraid to let the authorities operate as third parties. Just hand them the mike and tell them they cannot

use foul language or conduct commercial business. 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.

15. If 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 do not 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.

16. In Emergency Nets you will, on rare occasions, hear a station break in with the words, "Priority" or "Emergency". When either of these words is heard, everything stops! NCS is obligated to stop everything and answer these calls immediately! It is important that you clearly understand when these words are to be used.

PRIORITY - means that your message concerns an immediate SAFETY ISSUE regarding Human Life or Injury or an immediate SAFETY ISSUE regarding impending property damage.

EMERGENCY is the highest priority message possible. It must involve, and is reserved for, ONLY those messages that contain information that someone IS ABSOLUTELY in DANGER OF DEATH or SERIOUS INJURY IF YOUR MESSAGE IS NOT HEARD IMMEDIATELY.

Here is an example: If you observe that a damaged brick wall is in danger of falling into the street . . . that is a safety issue, and should rank as a Priority call. If the wall just fell on two people in the street, that is a "danger of death" issue and would definitely qualify as an Emergency call.

17. Whenever you join a net, . . . any net, try to turn your emotional sensitivity down a couple of notches. To operate with continuing professionalism, you have to become as objective as possible. Do not lose sight of what you are trying to accomplish. Develop as unemotional an attitude as possible to what is happening, how you are spoken to, how you speak, how you react to someone else's inexperience, how you react to what sounded like a drill sergeant's direct order, etc. On the air, there is never a proper time or place for emotional outbursts or criticism of any kind. 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. You may be tired, wet, hungry and bored. It is a volatile mix. Be aware of it. Typically, there is a whole lot going on in an NCS that the field operators never know about. This stress level increases dramatically if the field operators are not well trained. The higher the training levels for field operators and NCS operators, the smoother everything will go.

18. One other very important rule of thumb: If you should hear on your scanner or by other means, that there is an emergency in progress somewhere, DO NOT rush in and volunteer your services or demand that you be used for communications. Nothing is more unwelcome and distasteful to the authorities than an uninvited, eager beaver, demanding ham. There is no room for ambulance and fire truck chasing in the Amateur Radio Service. If you have not been given a specific assignment by a Net Control Station, do not go to a disaster or incident site. If they need us, they will call us out by contacting ARES/RACES leaders.

#### GENERAL NET STUFF

A common question from new hams is: "Who can start a net?" The answer is that any licensed amateur radio operator can start a net. If you happen upon a situation that will require assistance beyond your personal capabilities, do not be afraid to start a net to get that assistance. A net does not have to be a massive event. Many times, only three or four stations are required to service a situation. If you are not comfortable running a net, ask that someone else take the duties as NCS.

This leads us to another question: Who should be a NCS? One of the more important and often overlooked factors is signal strength and audio quality. A weak station is virtually useless as a net control. The NCS should be easily heard and understood by all net participants. All the experience in the world is negated by a weak signal and poor audio. A less experienced operator with a good signal and audio is much preferred to fill the NCS operating position. Net Control functions can always be passed off to a more experienced operator with a good signal.

Your experiences in emergency nets will eventually lead you to encounter something called the "Incident Command System." This is a more or less universal method of operation and communication for fire departments, emergency management, law enforcement agencies and other government entities that deal with emergencies. It varies little from place to place.

Well-designed ARES/RACES organizations will incorporate elements of the Incident Command Sys-

tem into their organizations, net structures, operating procedures and training exercises. This allows responding hams to understand and operate without confusion because they have been trained using the same basic organizational structure as the served agencies. Nearly any time that conflict occurs between a served agency and an amateur radio group, the conflict is based on the fact that the amateurs and their leaders don't understand, utilize and practice using ICS structures. The biggest problems occur when an amateur operator or net control is suddenly told to report to someone new. Just do it! Report the change to your NCS. (He probably already knows about the change.) The Command System approached an overload point and it just split up some duties and responsibilities.

Your job is the same . . . you just got a new boss.

The operational principles of the ICS are quite simple and easy to incorporate. The basic concept of the ICS is that a system (net) will reach a point of overload and inefficiency at some point in an escalating event. The ICS pre-defines these limits quite effectively. When a lead organization (Main or Tactical net) begins to hit the overload threshold, it splits off into smaller pre-defined and easily controlled special units (sub-nets) that take on specific responsibilities and levels of authority in support of the lead organization. These smaller units operate independently and report only priority traffic to the lead organization. The focus is always on keeping the "Span of Control" quite narrow at all levels. In a big emergency, you will seldom find more than seven (usually five) units (sub-nets) reporting to a lead organization (net control). Simple and highly efficient. So, why don't hams like to use it?

Hams are patriotic, independent people and they are volunteers. The general attitude among hams is that "Volunteers don't have to take orders." That is correct. We do not have to take orders. But, in the opinion of this Author, if we are going to be really effective in dealing with the served agencies, we have to respect and cooperate with the word "command" in the Incident Command System. When we step into a professional paramilitary "Command" structure as a volunteer, we should expect, and be willing, to be commanded! We pay great lip service to the words "Serve, Service, and Served." All these words relate directly to the word "Servant" and Servants do have to take some commands occasionally. We should expect it, respect a system that works, accept it and learn how to function within it.

