Contacting Operators During Group Activation

By Richard Polivka, N6NKO/9, ARRL Technical Specialist

In my last article in this newsletter, I discussed communications preparedness, some of the problems that we experience in preparing and some ideas on how to become prepared. While reading a recent SHARES newsletter, I came across a specific problem that surfaced during the earthquake in Seattle. Stan has related that a number of ECs in Wisconsin ARES/RACES are struggling with this very same problem right now. That is, how to contact people when a group is activated.

When searching for solutions to any problem, it is often useful and revealing to enumerate all the possible solutions so that the best may be selected. Accordingly, I submit for your consideration the following outline of ways to originate contact.

I. PHONE TREE
    A. Cell phone
        1. Direct contact (cell phone to cell phone)
        2. Short Message Service (SMS, accessed via email)
        3. Voice Mail service
    B. Home or Office phone
        1. Direct contact (phone to phone)
        2. Voice mail (phone to Voice Mail Service)

II. PAGER TREE
    A. Phone to Pager Service
    B. Internet mail to Pager Service

III. EMAIL TREE
    A.   Office or Home originated email group message
    B. Cell phone originated email group message

IV. PACKET
    A. MBO (Mailbox Operation)
    B. Individuals station mailbox

V. DIRECT RADIO CONTACT
    A. Simplex
    B. Duplex (repeater)

The above outline covers possible routes of contact for the operatives in your organization. Since very few of us have the golden opportunity of working in front of their radio and listening to it full time, there have to be alternate paths of communications to use. Of course, all of these paths, or just one, may be available during a callout. This requires a bit of ingenuity on the parts of the people doing the callout to ensure proper coverage - to the most individuals.

The information necessary to contact individuals should already be gathered and disseminated to the people who are authorized to call out the troops. Hopefully this was gathered at the time that you registered your volunteers. Those who have the authority to perform call-outs should be decentralized and spread throughout the coverage area. This way, if one person loses the ability to "call out the troops", then that person should be able to contact one of the other list holders to do it.

Even with a decentralized list and adequate callout procedures in place, there is no guarantee of an instant response from all bodies concerned (see my

article in the April 2000 issue of this newsletter). Therefore, you must plan for this contingency and compensate accordingly, especially during the business day.

As the old adage states, even the best laid plans of mice and men oft go astray. To avoid your plans from going astray requires that you select responsible and competent people to participate in the first line callout. The "me-too's" should not be selected or relied on for this responsibility. While this is a rather harsh approach, one must be honest when appraising abilities and qualifications to perform important assignments. A few well trained, multi-talented operators will handle traffic more efficiently than a whole bunch of mediocre operators who are always asking for fills in "closed-circuit quality" communications circuits. Here again, this points out to training – training – training!!!

At the beginning of an event, communications demands will be quite intensive. This will require your best operators to get the ball rolling, to absorb the initial shock of incoming messages and to call out other people to help with the later shifts. Then your less efficient operators can be brought in as the situation cools off. However, be cognizant of the fact that conditions could get rough again at any time.

Of course, our resources are finite and not as plentiful as we would wish. This causes a real problem in sizing up our capabilities. Unfortunately, those people who are quite capable of filling the critical positions because of their innate or learned abilities are also those who are in business positions that do not allow them to freely participate on the spur of the moment. Here again, this is where training comes in – so that you can be sure to have an adequate pool of committed, qualified operators available around the clock.

How does your group rate in terms of preparedness? Think about it.

ARES Responds to Train Car Fire

By Dan Lenz (KB9IME), EC Winnebago County

[I pulled this narrative by Dan from the April 2001 issue of his Winnebago County ARES/RACES Newsletter, because it shows the challenges to and reactions of an EC during an actual incident. Thanks, Dan, for sharing it!]

On Dec 17, 2000, at about 1600L, residents near the Wisconsin Central rail siding on the South East side of Oshkosh noticed foul smelling smoke coming from a box car. This was the start of what was to become a three-day evacuation for 600 residents and closed businesses. After visiting the Red Cross

Shelter and the EOC, it was clear that ARES was not needed that night. But in talking with Gary Trulson, the City of Oshkosh Emergency Manager, the full scope of the disaster was not yet clear. After returning home, I reviewed the situation as it had been presented and decided to activate Winnebago County ARES in a standby status on 18 Dec 00. I posted a packet message and an email message outlining the situation and our intended course. At 0815L, a net was established and the Section Emergency Coordinator had been alerted to the developing situation. Within the first two hours, packet contacts were established with the state EOC and the lead chapter of the Red Cross in the Madison area. Traffic had been passed to RACES members statewide via the RACES net on HF, and our surrounding counties had been notified and had checked in to offer assistance if needed. The National Traffic System was notified on the Badger Emergency Net and the Wisconsin Sideband Net at noon and 1715L. By day's end, all of the state was aware of the fire and was ready to help if needed.

The statistics are impressive. Of Winnebago County's 43 members, 34 checked in, and 15 were ready to deploy. Fourteen counties responded with offers of help and 18 pieces of formal traffic were passed. Although not called on to assist in the evacuation, our response proved that we are ready and able to assist in disasters. Thankfully, this one ended with out loss of life or serious damage to property.

NTS

By Dennis Rybicke, K9LGU, <onewish@compufort.com>
Wisconsin Section Traffic Manager

[From Denny's March 2001 STM Report.]

Time for another reminder about the NTS. You have traffic for Ohio. Why not go right to an Ohio section net and see if there is an outlet? Fast, efficient, and easy, right? Maybe. Here is what the ARRL has to say about Deviation from Normal Routing.

"Failure to use the normal routings, if carried to the extreme, will result in 'strangulation' of one or more NTS nets at region or area level. That is, if section nets send representatives to other section nets to clear traffic direct instead of through the region net, the region net will "starve" for traffic. Similarly, if region nets maintain liaison with each other direct instead of through the common medium of the area net, the latter will have little traffic and will not prosper. It is in the interest of efficiency, organization, system, training and conservation of skilled personnel to use the NTS structure as it is intended to be used. Let us not be ridiculous, however. Those who would follow the system to the letter are occasionally

guilty only of unnecessarily delaying delivery. Any station in NTS, regardless of the function the operator performs, who receives a message destined to a point in his local calling area, should deliver that message rather than filter it further through the system. There are many metropolitan areas which straddle NTS net coverage boundaries but have common toll-free telephone coverage."

It would also be a good idea to exercise the system by generating some traffic. Please send at least one message per month and ask your friends, fellow club members, to do the same. It could be a pleasant greeting to someone else on a net. It might be a thanks for a QSO to someone you worked on another frequency. It could be standard seasonal greetings. Maybe a compliment to a good NCS is in order. One message per month isn't asking too much. We handle traffic for practice. Let's use the system.

This is also the season for severe weather. Although traffic handled on weather nets is not the format one usually sees on section nets as part of the National Traffic System, it is certainly important traffic - and the usual rules apply. Get it right. Be clear and succinct. Follow the directions of the net control. Listen. Listen. Listen. It's a chance to apply the skills and discipline you have learned about traffic handling. For more information on the emergency management aspect of traffic handling, there are lots of good hints on Stan's website http://www.execpc.com/~skaplan.

Have a good spring. Send some traffic. 73 – Denny

New WI Registration Form

Richard Polivka (N6NKO), ARRL Technical Specialist, has done the Wisconsin Section a great service by designing a new form (a copy is enclosed with this newsletter for local reproduction and use). It is also on our wi-aresraces.org (note new address!) web page under Other Documents of Interest. It is a tiny .pdf file (~35k), so it will be a snap to download if you need a clean copy at any time.

ECs, use this form to register new members of your group, and even consider having your current members fill it out. The new form is much more comprehensive than the ARRL version, and therefore, much more useful to ECs during emergencies. Just take a look at the enclosed copy. It even provides for data on 4-wheel drive vehicles and snowmobiles, both of which could be important to know when sending ops to, for example, shelters during winter storms. Shift availability is also new and useful, and there are other new items as well.

The form is designed for EC use only, at the local level only. There is no intent to gather any additional information at the District or Section level. We just want to make your life a little easier, especially during emergencies when the new information might be very important. Indeed, if you want to customize the form even more for use with your group, contact Stan for a copy of Richard's original Microsoft EXCEL (.xls) version of the document so that you can modify and print it locally. For example, units located where flooding is common might want to include provision for listing small craft availability.

At the very least, however, please adopt the form as it stands now to replace ARRL Form FSD-98, the Amateur Radio Emergency Service Registration Form (June 1987). The new form is officially the Wisconsin Section replacement. And, thank you, Richard, for your hard work in designing it!

New Website Address

Our thanks to our website guru Ray Meyer (N9PBY) for detecting plummeting prices for new addresses! For only a few bucks per year, our old address (http://www.execpc.com/~skaplan) is now simply that shown on the masthead of this issue:

http://wi-aresraces.org

This identifies us as Wisconsin, ARES and RACES, a complete and reasonable description. Note that you do not need to change your bookmarks, because the new address simply redirects to the old one. The actual site is still maintained under the old address, which will continue to work just fine.

Resignations and Appointments

Kent Helman (W9LZQ) has left the position of DEC for West Central Wisconsin. Tom O'Brien (WB9BJQ) was appointed in his place effective 18 April. Tom also continues his previous position as EC of La Crosse County. Welcome to the new job, Tom!

Robert Emberger (KB9BTB) is recuperating from a health problem and has resigned as EC for St. Croix County to focus on getting well. Know any capable hams in St. Croix to fill his shoes? Let Stan know. We wish Bob a speedy recovery! How about sending him a card or an email?

HAVE A SAFE, FUN FIELD DAY!

Why the EC Roster Should List Your Real Email Address

[The following message, forwarded to me by Don Michalski (W9IXG, our ARRL Section Manager), explains why reflector addresses are not a good idea in emergencies. Therefore, I request that, at least for the EC Roster, you provide a real address. Edited.]

Friday, April 20, 2001 10:55 AM

Subject: [smarrl] Reflectors

From: Harry Lewis, W7JWJ   ARRL SM Western Washington

In the spring of 2000, a major demonstration against Kaiser Aluminum in Tacoma, Washington was in the works. Fearful that it might turn into another riot similar to the one that impacted Seattle in November of 1999, ARES volunteers in the area were recruited to provide communications by the U.S. Coast Guard and Emergency Management officials.

Knowing that those helping the demonstrators were using scanners to monitor Ham, FRS, GMRS and REACT frequencies, our SEC used the @arrl.net reflector to schedule assignments. During the weekend of the demonstrations the @arrl.net reflector failed. There appeared to be no flag to alert Headquarters staff of the failure. There was a backup plan that was put in place to solve the problem. Nevertheless, the reflector does fail from time to time. Accordingly, we now ask all ARES appointees to provide their direct email address to obviate this problem during emergencies.

Section Leadership

Wisconsin has only a single Section. Here is the team of appointments that manage the ARRL Wisconsin Section, along with a short description of their jobs:

SECTION MANAGER: Don Michalski, W9IXG. Responsible for managing the Field Organization programs in the section. This is a two-year elected position. The SM is not involved in League policy making; this function is reserved for the Division Director. The SM's main job is to recruit, through several subordinate program managers or coordinators, League volunteers to staff eight crucial program areas: Emergency communications, Message traffic, Monitoring, RFI problem solving and technical support, Government liaison, Support of affiliated clubs, Public information, and Dissemination of on-the-air bulletins.

ASSISTANT SECTION MANAGERS: Gene Santoski, K9UTQ, Rick Elsener, W9RCW, and Hale Blakely, W9CBE (traffic specialist). Responsible for helping the SM administer the section, attend ham club meetings and hamfests when the SM cannot attend. Sometimes ASMs are appointed to handle a specific duty. There is no limit to the number of ASMs that can be appointed by the SM.

SECTION EMERGENCY COORDINATOR: Stan Kaplan, WB9RQR. The coordinator of all matters pertaining to emergency communications and ARES/RACES within the section. The **Assistant SEC** is **Sam Rowe, KG9NG**.

BULLETIN MANAGER: Dale Johnson, WB9NRK

Responsible for recruiting and supervising a team of Official Bulletin Stations to disseminate news and information of interest in the section and to provide a means of getting the news and information to all OBS appointees.

AFFILIATED CLUB COORDINATOR: Roy Pederson, K9FHI. The primary contact and resource person for each ARC in the section, specializing in motivating, providing assistance and coordinating joint activities of clubs.

TECHNICAL COORDINATOR: Richard Regent, K9GDF. Coordinates all technical activities within the section. Oversees and coordinates the work of all Technical Specialists.

STATE GOVERNMENT LIAISON: James Lackore, AD9X. Knowledgeable on state legislative and regulatory proposals. Responsible for monitoring and responding appropriately to those proposals having the potential to affect Amateur Radio.

SECTION TRAFFIC MANAGER: Dennis Rybicke, K9LGU. Supervises the traffic handling organization at the section level and coordinates all traffic efforts within the section, regardless of mode or National Traffic System affiliation, so that routings within the section and connections with the other networks and digital traffic nodes will result in orderly and efficient traffic flow.

OFFICIAL OBSERVER COORDINATOR: Richard Elsener, W9RCW Supervises the maintenance monitoring work of the section Official Observers and coordinates special Amateur Auxiliary efforts with Headquarters and SM.

PUBLIC INFORMATION COORDINATOR: Jim Romelfanger, K9ZZ The section coordinator for public information and relations matters. The PIC is responsible for organizing, training, guiding and coordinating the activities of the Public Information Officers, PIOs, within the section.