

RESOURCES

As you all have heard myself and other ASTEN NCS's say before, we need more NCS's in training because if a large disaster ever occurred in Arkansas we would not have enough NCS's to work all the VHF/UHF and HF nets that would be running around the clock. Most of the HF nets we have in Arkansas are in need of NCS's and alternate NCS's as well. We have the Arkansas Phone Net that runs Monday through Saturday on 3.987.50 at 6:00 AM and I feel sure that if you contacted Gene, W5SXV the Net Manager he would be willing to give you a chance. Next, we have the Mockingbird Net that runs Monday through Friday at 4:30 PM on 3.927.00 and Larry, K0ON needs some NCS's and alternates. Mr. John, KE5NZY, Net Manager for this net need's more NCS's and alternates also. I think the Razorback Net is full at this time, but if anyone would really like to give it a try on the Razorback Net, I would give up my slot as an alternate for the Saturday session if Randy would approve it.

Human Resource Issues for the Net Manager and NCS

There is something in Amateur Radio for each and every ham. Some like "rag chewing," some enjoy emergency communications and some live for that next contest. But still others take on another role, that of Net Control Station. Have you ever wondered just what that "voice in charge" of your local net has to do? And have you ever thought about doing it yourself?

This evenings training material comes from the ARECC level two and is designed to help net managers and NCS operators make the most effective use of valuable and limited human resources.

Every emergency communications leader and net manager face a similar problem and that is how to ensure that they have enough qualified volunteers to keep the net running at maximum efficiency. While every possible contingency cannot be planned for, there are things that can be done to minimize any problems

"Just enough" is never enough:

On the average, for every ten volunteers on hand, there will be at least one who will have equipment or transportation problems, or have a personal emergency. If you have only "just enough" volunteers, you actually are about ten percent short for the event. One or two "floaters" who can act as a "relief" for almost any of your operators will help communications run more smoothly. In addition, having an extra person to act as a "runner" at each station will help your group function more efficiently.

Handovers:

During any event that lasts more than four to six hours, you may need to turn over operation of one or more of the locations in the net to a "relief" operator. If you are the NCS operator, it is in the best interest of the net and your sanity to do likewise and turn control of the net over to another operator after two or three hours.

These handovers should be planned to avoid any disruption to the net or its mission. To facilitate the change of operators, the new operator will need:

1. A list of outstanding messages.
2. Log of traffic sent.
3. Status of open queries.
4. Local and remote contacts for each location (served agency and others as necessary).
5. Any other information the outgoing operator feels is necessary.
6. Whenever possible, both operators should work together for at least ten minutes to ensure a smooth transition.

Coverage Breaks:

A coverage break occurs when a station fails to be available during a net. This can be caused by equipment failures, or overly tired operators who

fail to pay attention. Prior agreement on how the coverage breaks are to be handled should be contained in your communication plan.

NCS Coverage Breaks -- The best way to handle a NCS coverage break is with a pre-arranged off-site backup NCS. This station keeps a duplicate copy of the logs and can become the NCS in just a few moments. If possible, assign this task to a station with no or few other duties.

If the primary NCS suddenly goes off the air, the backup NCS must assume control of the net immediately. After announcing that he is assuming the role of NCS, he should call for any emergency traffic, and then do a "roll call" to establish continuity. After the roll call, regular net operations can resume. If the new NCS operator had a previous assignment, a reserve operator can be assigned to take it over.

Non-NCS Coverage Breaks -- When a station fails repeatedly to respond to calls from NCS, an effort should be made to check that the operator is OK and does not need assistance. If there is critical traffic holding for that station, then a relief operator will need to be dispatched immediately. If the traffic can be held for several minutes, then a re-

evaluation should be made at that time. If the coverage break was from equipment failure that can be corrected, then the relief operator may be recalled. If the coverage break was caused by fatigue, injury, or illness, the relief operator should take over.

Handling an Irate Participant:

This is one of the toughest problems any emergency communications leader will face. If handled incorrectly, it can polarize other participants and perhaps lead to the disintegration of the group. Morale will erode and the effectiveness of your effort will suffer.

People's feelings can be hurt over seemingly small occurrences, especially when they are tired and in unusually stressful circumstances. Your first reactions need to be:

1. Slow down. Do not act or respond immediately. Take a deep breath.
2. Quickly review what you know about the upset person.
3. If you are on the air, take the discussion off line when possible: "John, let's see if we can solve this on the phone. Please call me at xxx-

xxxx." This tactic allows the net to continue undisturbed and takes the discussion off the air.

4. Acknowledge the problem, regardless of who is right or wrong! Once you agree that there is a problem, the "fight" is gone. Deal with the details off-air. All you need to say is "I agree that we have a problem -- can we talk about it off the air later?"
5. Empathize with them! Tell them that you understand how they feel and that, were the situation reversed, you would probably feel the same way.
6. Sometimes the problem they bring up initially may not be the real problem at all, and it may require some tactful detective work to discover the true problem.
7. Ask them to suggest a simple yet reasonable solution. Listen intently! This is the point where they will usually reveal the *real* problem. Somewhere in their suggestion, they will tell you what they really want from you.
8. If their suggestion or solution is reasonable, tell them that you will try to make it happen. If it is not, make a counter-suggestion that will satisfy the real problem they revealed to you.
9. If the problem cannot be resolved quickly and reasonably, quietly send someone to replace

this individual and relieve him from his post. If there are no posts involved in the operation, give up -- let him win. Politely explain that the net must continue, thank the person for his services, and tell him he doesn't have to stick around. You tried to solve the problem reasonably and he refused. The rest of the net will respect what you did and morale will remain intact.

10. Irate and immature people can become a source of malicious interference if "kicked out" or embarrassed. Keep this in mind when dealing with a problematic individual during a critical event. Will removing the individual cause the problem to go from bad to worse?

Dealing with Malicious Interference:

Most people who interfere with nets or casual conversations are individuals who think the only way to get attention is to behave improperly. The best way to handle them initially is to ignore them. On HF in particular, they may assume that they are not being heard. When they can evoke no response at all, they tend to leave. Let them leave without comment. If you comment in any way, these people will persist.

Plan to have alternate frequencies contained in your communication plan, or announced at the pre-event briefing. Should the interference become intolerable, move to an alternate frequency. When you move to another frequency, do so under a pre-announced set of conditions (at the briefing) and without saying anything on the primary frequency.

For FM nets, you may want to try having your local "fox hunters" track down the offending station. This will need to be a coordinated effort that is not announced on the net or any other commonly known frequency.

If all else fails, contact a local OO or Amateur Auxiliary station (your SM or SEC may be of help here) to help find the problem and perhaps bring the FCC into the effort.