

PRECEIVED PROBLEMS

Operating during emergency/disaster conditions are usually nowhere near pretty. Many operators might not have proper training or forms, and are operating under very stressful conditions; many might have lost their homes, car, radios, and all of their clothing that they was not wearing. The entire mess can be very confusing, bandwidth is at a premium, and operators may simply forget the exact procedure for sending or receiving ARRL message forms. The messages might not even be on ARRL message forms; we've all heard ICS and Red Cross forms used as well. Everyone is talking way too fast with the excitement and urgency of the situation.

We are told that the solution to the lack of training for some people is that if we pass a message in NTS format and the receiver doesn't understand what that was all about, to try it again, this time reading everything on the form to an untrained person who is already rattled from screwing it up the first time.

Although some of you may feel that untrained operators should not be involved in emergency operations, the real world does not allow for that. We need everyone we can get, since we would never have enough operators to cover all the needs in a large scale communications emergency. So, we all do

the best we can to train those that are willing to be trained and hope our message is at least being heard, if not practiced, by the wanna-be's that believe they can serve during emergencies without proper training. Both Training and Practice are the KEYS to anything we do if we are going to succeed.

The following information is intended as an aid to help anyone write and send a formal written message.

*Getting down to the nitty-gritty of actually doing it!!!*

Special care is required when preparing written third party message traffic for transmission over the Section or Regional NTS traffic nets. You may ask, "What is third party traffic?" The generally accepted definition is "A short written noncommercial messages between people who are not amateur radio operators".

The objective of traffic nets is to cause these written messages to transit the system, word for word, character for character, and be able to be handled without alteration via any of the common modes of transmission currently in use such as CW, SSB, VHF-FM, Packet, or PACTOR. It is desired to reproduce the message at the far end of the system exactly as it was initially sent, however this is not always the case. The following are but a few

problems we have when passing traffic that we must correct.

1. Altered texts. The message text does not arrive at destination exactly as it was sent at origination. It appears the message “content” is being relayed, rather than exactly what was to be sent in some instances. Omissions in Preambles, Addresses, Text and Signatures are known to occur.
2. Additions of “Handling Extra” codes to message preamble during relaying, Changed points of origin, “additions” (such as telephone numbers) to address information, parts of addresses deleted en route during relaying.
3. Some names and unusual words are relayed inaccurately.
4. Message check does not agree with number of words/groups in text.

END PART ONE

START PART TWO

Some of these problems could be due to carelessness or lack of attention to detail during relay work; some could be due to lack of training.

There seem to be instances where messages are copied and relayed on without any proper verification that what was transmitted was actually correctly

received. Misuse of the correct way of “signing” for a message correctly and completely received appears to be a factor. Apparently, the word “ROGER” on voice mode, or “QSL” and “R” on CW is being used when in fact the message has not been properly and completely received and copied down. Perhaps not enough emphasis is being placed on the need to stop the sending operator and get repeats, verification or “fills” before completing the relay work.

Voice modes have unique relaying problems that do not exist in the CW or digital modes where character-by-character or file transfer is used. Because of this fact, considerable extra care must be taken to ensure sufficient accuracy is maintained. Unfortunately, the English language has many words that sound the same but are spelled differently and/or have different meanings. (Example: “Four” vs. “for” etc.) Some names are troublesome. (Examples: “Cathy” vs. “Kathy” or “Sara” vs. “Sarah”, “John” vs. “Jon” etc.).

Careful message origination can reduce the potential for transmission errors but that is beyond the control of relay operators. They must relay accurately what they receive no matter how strong the temptation is to “correct” perceived errors. Message texts must be

protected from alteration at all costs. This is one place where little things DO matter.

If the message text is already messed up, do not make things worse by trying to fix it without proper verification from the operator who sent it to you or better yet from the originating station if possible.

Proper use of phonetics can aid message relaying in voice modes. However, care must be taken to use the standard ITU phonetic code words, not some cute variation that you dreamed up. The meaning might be different to the receiving operator. Learn and use the standard ITU Phonetic Code, always.

If some problem prevents prompt relaying beyond your station for an unacceptable period of time, service the originating station and request instructions, you might be requested to continue to attempt relay, or cancel the message. However, NEVER throw a message away without direct permission to do so from the sender.

NEVER add “Handling Extra” codes in message preambles. Relay only what the sender puts on the message. Delivering stations may need to look up numbers during the delivery process attempts, but NEVER-EVER “add” anything to a message when

you are relaying it.

Never “shorten” or omit items in a message address. Pass it on exactly as you receive it, even if the addressee is known to you. There could be some need for all that information in the actual delivery process, which you as a relaying operator may be unaware of.

Diligence and great care in relaying third party written messages is required of all participants in Section and Regional National Traffic System nets. If due regard is not paid to this requirement, all the effort of the other amateurs involved in the process is diminished or wasted. Be a helpful part of the process, instead of part of the problem. Relay properly with accuracy and timeliness!

Handling third party written message traffic is one of the reasons we exist. Amateurs are always helping out when commercial communications fail; sometimes we are the only service that can. The rules, procedures and protocols for this activity are well spelled out in a number of available publications. Most of the time we handle messages just for practice, and in the doing of that, here are some things to think about.

If you check into one of the Section NTS affiliated

statewide nets, you might sometime get called upon to handle a third party written message. Do you know how to do it properly?

Message handling work takes a certain amount of commitment on the part of all amateur operators who engage in it. If it is to be done at all it is important that it is done correctly.

What it boils down to, is simply this....If you are going to engage in handling message traffic, resolve to LEARN HOW to do it and how DO IT RIGHT, and then COMMIT YOUR EFFORTS to always doing it so. Especially when dealing with "The Last Mile". A little practice now and then will help too.

The Amateur Service will be the better for it, and so will you.