

## Learning Unit 8

### Health and Welfare Traffic Management

#### ARECC

##### *Information:*

One of the greatest challenges during a disaster is efficiently moving large volumes of formal "health and welfare" messages. The ARRL-recommended precedence for this type of message, "Welfare" (W), refers to either an advisory message from the disaster area that indicates a person's status, or an inquiry as to the health and welfare of an individual in the disaster area.

##### **Red Cross Is the Lead Agency**

Under US federal law, the American Red Cross has primary responsibility for disaster relief services in the United States and its possessions. The Salvation Army, and state and local agencies may also handle welfare messages, but usually do so in concert with the Red Cross.

When working with the Red Cross on its disaster welfare inquiry program, you must submit to their authority on the subject. Respect any moratorium on DWI messages they impose -- usually up to the first 72 hours, depending on the scale of the disaster. The moratorium gives Red Cross staff time to move in and set up in the affected area, and to establish offices and networks to handle the inquiries.

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##### **Monitoring the Situation**

NTS net managers and members should listen to bulletins from ARRL HQ and appropriate nets on the status of health and welfare traffic handling, especially with respect to any special nets/frequencies that may be dedicated to welfare traffic handling. News of any Red Cross moratoriums will usually be included in ARRL bulletins. Maintain close contact with the Red Cross or the Salvation Army as appropriate, since most inquiries are handled through these organizations.

##### **Dealing with Large Volumes of Traffic**

The NTS policy is to handle as many DWI messages as possible, but higher-precedence messages must be handled first. NCS operators for nets handling

welfare traffic must pause frequently to ask if any stations have emergency or priority messages.

In a widespread disaster, it is seldom possible to handle all the welfare traffic quickly and efficiently. At times, DWI messages pile up alarmingly, even to the extent that much of it is never delivered.

In these cases, high volume digital modes should be used rather than slower phone and CW. In the past, special Winlink, RTTY, AMTOR, fax, and packet circuits have been established with great success, and hold great promise for high volume, high accuracy traffic handling.

One or more "hotline circuits" may be established between specific points, such as a Red Cross office outside the affected area, and one inside. This speeds traffic to its destination and frees up nets for other duties, bypassing the normal NTS net structure.

### **Outgoing Advisories Have Precedence**

Place a priority on handling "welfare status report messages" (advisories) coming *out* of the disaster area. One out-bound message can prevent many in-bound inquiries from clogging the system.

Never try to force inquiries into a disaster area. Welfare inquiries should only be passed when higher precedence traffic and outgoing advisories have been cleared. In-bound messages have a poor chance of being delivered for several reasons. In many cases, there is no mechanism for the delivery of welfare inquires. The addressee may be in any number of shelters or have left the area completely. Local phone lines may be out and travel difficult or impossible. Local mail delivery will have been suspended. Be sure that stations in the affected areas are truly able to receive and process inquiries before sending them. The Red Cross will usually provide guidance on this issue, and it should be distributed via ARRL bulletins.

### **Accepting "Local" Inquiries**

Sometimes a friend or neighbor will ask you to send an inquiry to someone in an affected area. Unless means for handling DWI messages are established, it is usually wise not to accept them from the public, or do so only with an explicit understanding that chances of delivery are not very good. If the system is up and running, the message may be passed into the NTS at any appropriate point.

**Prohibited Message Content:**

If you are accepting a message from its author, certain information should be refused or strongly discouraged. Outgoing advisories or responses to DWI messages from the disaster area should never include a person's home address. Enterprising thieves have been known to listen to scanners and then loot evacuees' homes.

NEVER handle or deliver a fatality report in any Amateur Radio message. That function is strictly reserved for disaster officials through their own channels.

Other items that should never be sent include financial information, bank or credit card numbers, driver license or Social Security numbers, or any personal details that could lead to identity theft.

In some instances, the served agency may allow you to send certain "sensitive" information over more "discrete" modes, such as Winlink, but be sure they fully understand that no Amateur mode can be considered truly "secure." The served agency is the ultimate authority on which information can or cannot be sent, and by which modes.