

*ARES/National Traffic System/WL2K*

Just for background information, the NTS has been in place for more than 50 years and is a well defined, smooth functioning system. NTS Nets are in place all over the country and are continuously passing traffic back and forth. Not too many years ago, this was one of the fastest ways to get a message across the country. Today, with high speed digital communication at our fingertips, it might seem like an obsolete method.

The big importance of the NTS today is to keep our communicating skills tuned and ready to function properly and efficiently in the event of a local or national emergency. Remember that the possibility of failed phone systems, including cell systems, is a real possibility. It happened on September 11 and also during Hurricanes Katrina, Wilma and Rita.

The need to be able to pass emergency traffic quickly and without error is a very important function that can be provided by well trained hams. Please underline "WELL TRAINED".

When untrained hams try to help, their intentions are good, but sometimes the result is chaotic and even counter productive. So.... Remember the Boy Scout motto... BE PREPARED! Training and Preparation

are two very important aspects of any serious organizational group and most especially of Amateur Radio Emergency Communicators.

One of the biggest hurdles we face as emergency communicators is the element of surprise involved with an emergency situation. Often, we have no advanced warning that an impending emergency will occur and thus ARES and the NTS responds to the event as a reaction instead of being proactive.

Therefore, we should strive to acquire a certain level of readiness and preparation for such events. Some of the ways we can do this is to prepare personal ready kits, complete ARECC training courses and practice our emergency communication plans. One of the main areas that should be of primary concern to all ARES and NTS operators is to hone our individual operating skills.

That's what ARES is all about... emergency communicators who know the how's, why's, what's and when's to make a communication system work when the normal stuff does not. That's not an easy task, yet one that we should do our best to be prepared to accomplish when the time comes.

In all the history of disaster and emergency communications, from the bleak beginnings to the 21st century, we can see how the combination of

great potential with lack of planning and preparedness has caused fiasco after fiasco. Technology will be of little benefit without the foresight to use it wisely. This history is also abounding with examples of how old practices die hard. It is my hope that the information I brought you this evening will enable us as Emergency Communications professionals to begin to find ways to adjust our planning for disasters and emergencies. An essential part of that planning should include the deployment and effective use of the best means of communications that we have at our disposal.

Current capabilities of amateur radio include much more than the Morse code telegraphy of yesteryears or even the clear and intelligible voice technologies of today. There are digital technologies that include data packets, even Winlink 2000 e-mail via radio, and satellite technology. Indeed, the two entities that have the most unbreakable, most long range, most dependable emergency communications in the world are the military and the amateur radio communities. Computer linkage via the Internet has permitted interlinking of radios and computers; the bridging of these modes of communication has enhanced the dependability of worldwide disaster communication.

