

“Why basis training is important”

Intro into lesson plan

During our weekly Arkansas Ares/Races Training Nets, Dale and I along with a lot of help and inspiration from our Section Manager David Norris and also our Section Emergency Coordinator J.M. Rowe, we strive to bring a variety of training subjects that will be of benefit and help all of us to be better prepared when the need arises. Since we never know where a call for help will come from or what conditions we may face when we arrive, we all need to be trained in a multitude of subjects and that is why we train in the fields of the NIMS and the ICS, how to be a NCS, Bio- terrorism and WMD, governmental operations, area security, family plans, CERT, CPR and Basic first aide, Skywarn, Earthquakes, Emergency communications, Operations and Logistics, Agency relationships, Hazardous materials, the National Traffic System and as you all know this list goes on and on. I am very proud to say that our Arkansas Ares/Races teams are among the very best trained and prepared in the Nation, and it is an honor and pleasure to be associated with this great group of folks.

Being a Ham radio operator myself, I am a proponent of developing Ham radio operators for service in support of public safety operations during emergencies and disasters, and that's not a blind endorsement, however I do have several concerns and recommendations for any amateur who desires a higher level of functionality:

TRAINING: So, Joe Ham memorized some questions and now has an FCC license. This, alone, is not a credential of value in support of Public Safety activities. The Technician, General or Extra class test does not cover any of the needs for our served agencies. The ARRL though has done a fine job of developing three levels of emergency communications certification and I recommend that everyone take all three of these courses, or at least level one, however there is still more that should be learned.

Education and training is what supplies the knowledge to help you build confidence in your ability to execute the required steps in the shortest amount of time and with the minimum amount of wasted motion. Hesitancy and indecisiveness will quickly tire you, as you are expending more mental energy than required, and that would soon dull your senses. Thus you educate yourself and train before the skills are needed. Education and training helps you function as part of a team.

Emergency communicators are part of an adaptive team that can rely on and support one another. All members must function as a cohesive unit. Individuals may possess great operating skills but will perform inadequately if they cannot work as part of a team.

We all need to undergo an educational/training program:

You may have to **UNLEARN** some things you thought you knew. There are many false concepts on emergency communications due to impressions that are not based on actual field experience. Some of the most important emergency communications operating principles differ significantly from traditional daily amateur radio practices. These because emergency communications requires a network of message relay stations to be built from scratch and operating within minutes or very few hours of an activation. Building a communications network is not done routinely by amateur operators in the normal course of enjoying the pastime. It is important to seek out educational material that is based on sound practices refined with actual field experience. Be open to learning new material and the rationale why it works.

Unlike individual amateur radio operators operating from a single station at home or in the mobile, emergency communications involve radio operators forming teams and relaying messages using both similar and dissimilar techniques simultaneously. Knowledgeable emergency communicators know very well that it's not a case of choosing which method is the "single one-size-fits-all method" for getting the job done but rather that it's a mix of techniques, whichever is appropriate for that particular message. These radio operators must work well and integrate with their host emergency management agency. While the lower levels of the operations may resemble and borrow from our personal experience as amateur radio technicians and operators, it requires personal growth to operate in a challenging environment such as the one that materializes during a disaster or

emergency.

When you go out on a real disaster or emergency there are several things you need to understand. The first four listed relate to expectations and attitude while the remainder deals with specific actions that your group will need to handle.

Expect confusion. When we respond to a field assignment, our served agencies are getting their response organized and are often being pulled in a number of directions. Expect that some people won't know why you're there, what it is that you are supposed to do, and whom you're doing it for.

1. Be flexible. Because of the confusion, we must always remain flexible and convey to those we are serving that we are here to help. Our ECs attempt to have location directions and contact names for each field assignment before our ARES member goes mobile, but this isn't always possible. Sometimes our function is clearly defined and understood, other times it isn't. Remaining flexible reduces your stress level and proves to our served agencies that you are a team player.

2. Know your audience. Do not report to a field assignment with either a Rambo or an attorney attitude. Neither is good, don't over dress, and try to look the part that's required. Outfit yourself as is appropriate for the situation. For example, don't arrive to assist the base camp of a wildfire in short pants and a tank top, you might be asked to leave because your clothing choices could put you in danger. Stop for a moment, consider your assignment and who you will be assisting, and make appropriate clothing and appearance choices. Don't arrive like you just crawled out from beneath a rock; always look clean and well kept.

3. Be aware of your first impressions. Some of us are shy, some are outgoing. Some are demure, others are outspoken. Know how others perceive you and adjust your character as needed for the situation. If you are a shy and quite individual, know that you might have to be bold to find the official or area you have been assigned to assist. If you are typically loud and outspoken, look around you, you might need to tone it down a little. If you are assigned to a Police/Fire dispatch center, loud talking and bold action are not going to be appreciated by the dispatchers who are assisting citizens with emergency needs.

4. Practicing emergency communications is best approached as a team effort scheduled on evenings or weekends and not while the actual emergency is happening. There are a number of ways to develop knowledge and practice. The best way is to learn from the experiences of other emergency communicators, taking the best practices and avoiding pitfalls that can occur in any setting. Skill is needed for handling simultaneous multiple activities that can arise during emergencies. The very nature of responding to an emergency affords very little in the way of on-the-spot education and training. Hence it is vital that the education, training and practice occur ahead of time. Coping with equipment problems, people requesting attention and a response, listening for a station with a weak and distorted signal, all the while trying to absorb the situation and direct a team effort on and off the air are real-life situations that can occur. Fortunately, there are ways to learn and practice in a broader setting that are enjoyable.

One key to the success of emergency communications is the amount of education, training and preparedness prior to the event. By learning, practicing and evaluating prior to the emergency, the overall level of proficiency is raised. During activation and operation, the time to develop one's skills and knowledge is limited or non-existent, yet this is the time when having that knowledge and experience makes the most difference.

Simulations, exercises and practice nets are proven ways to bring together these elements in a non-threatening and fun environment, developing the composure and skills, provide analysis and feedback and gain new confidence to rise above any situation.

The learning and training sessions leading up to the simulations and exercises are excellent ways for specialists to introduce the rest of the team to new modes or techniques. There are a number of things you can arrange to try out and practice before the exercise, then test the team's proficiency during the event. You have attempted an operating skill that few amateurs venture.

The National Traffic System is an excellent vehicle for practicing and relaying large volumes of messages in a timely and coordinated fashion. NTS stations practice originating, relaying and delivering messages, collectively called traffic,

quickly and efficiently. The skills honed with NTS experience removes the hesitation and mishandling that can happen when faced with having to pass traffic. One cannot anticipate all of the possible problems that can come up in the field or on-the-air during an event. By engaging in on-the-air activities, you practice solving problems spontaneously while continuing to communicate. Don't be overly concerned with problem solving because that will be developed simply by attempting to handle the message traffic and situations.

There is a very good reason for training in advance. You do not want to deploy into the field with any form of uncertainty or hesitation. You want to work out the "butterflies in your stomach" ahead of time in a comfortable and safe environment. Make your transmissions sound crisp and professional like the police and fire radio dispatchers and the air traffic controllers. Do not use any more transmission time on the radio than absolutely necessary. Someone is waiting to use the frequency.

All of the things I've presented this evening are reasons that we as Ham Radio Emergency Communicators should be trained and prepared for an emergency and or disaster. We cannot afford the luxury of setting by and thinking something is not going to happen, earthquakes do happen, tornadoes do happen, flooding does happen and so do many other natural and manmade disasters. Thousands of emergencies and disasters happen around the world each and every day. Ask yourself the following questions and honestly answer them:

1. Am I trained well enough to properly handle emergency traffic?
2. Do I know all of the new protocols of Ham Radio that have recently been introduced into emergency communications?
3. Have I had the require NIMS training that the Department of Homeland Security, FEMA and the Arkansas Department of Emergency Management requires for me to be able to respond if needed?
4. When was the last time I sat down and really studied and prepared for an emergency?
5. Why haven't I taken the ARRL's emcom courses? Was that an excuse I just heard or a moan?
6. Is my basic first aide and CPR up to date?

