

Good evening and thank you for joining us tonight.

I am going to call this program “Lessons Learned.” You might also call it questions from a rookie, because I hope to get input from the long timers as well.

It was only two weeks ago that we discussed preparation for hurricanes and message handling, as a prelude to Gustav. I was one of the people who volunteered and was chosen to be a NCS for the West Gulf Emergency Tactical Net on 3873 kc. Thankfully, things started slow enough for me to get my legs, so to speak, and I thought I would share some of my experiences with you. Some were good, some not so good.

The best place to start is to say that in order to be an effective EMCOM volunteer, you need the support of your family. The hours you put into this will dig into their time. I am very fortunate to have the support of my bride. She has long understood that this is the reason I have been going through all this training and supports me fully. Next you should have the support of your employer. I am Postal, which I’m sure brings up all kinds of images in your mind. Needless to say, the Postal Service was more than generous with me, if for no other reason than to get the idea out there, that we do other things, than go Postal. The reason I started with these topics is because the Net Manager is going to be juggling all sorts of activities. They will appreciate having someone ready to help that is trained and flexible. After all, the idea here is to be part of the cure, not the problem.

In the past we have tried to familiarize you with message formats associated with formal written traffic. However, in a tactical net, you will have very little formatted traffic. What this means is that you will have many non-numbered messages and pieces of information. You might be dealing with messages about storm and weather reports, power outages, and flooding to lost operational units and requests for equipment. It is your job to get the information to the intended recipient as quickly and accurately as possible. To be effective you will be required to know and pass this information to the appropriate personnel, then finally to the next net control and then your net manager. This will require an understanding of things at the local, section and division level. If I had not taken the ARECC and FEMA courses, I simply would not have understood it at all.

I also learned to use two logging practices; one on paper with pencil to get the message down quickly. Then during slower periods I would copy them to a logging program. This made passing that tours activities as well as important check-ins to the next controller, very easy. After a while, we had a good list of all the key players, their names, locations, tactical call signs, amateur call signs and, a running log of the activities as they played out.

Another lesson learned was to have good maps at your fingertips. I found that loading my street and topographic maps on my computer helped me better understand the areas and geography affected. This became critical when tornado and flooding issues followed the initial land fall of the hurricane. This can also help with your spatial reference for the location of different units.

Some things I might point out are; tactical nets do not keep a count so, “checking in for the count” is not advised. You are expected to monitor except when invited to transmit by the net control station. You may hear other stations than the net control station transmitting. These are generally NCS backups that either will be coming on as net control or are associated with the net in some way. One of the times when you, as a monitoring station, will be asked to participate, is if the net controller can not hear a station. This is your chance to join in. If you have copied their call and information and the net control station asks for a relay, say relay followed by your call sign. Be certain you have the information correct. You may be invited to contact the originating station to verify the information you are exchanging and you will be asked for your call sign for proper tracking. Keep your exchange brief and to the point. Log this contact in your station log.

I challenge each of you to monitor the tactical frequencies during Ike as it comes ashore. Get a piece of paper and try to copy the information passed. Get your maps out. Look at the affected areas and listen, listen, listen. If you can help with a relay I know for certain the net control will appreciate it. By now, many of you are capable of handling Health and Welfare traffic. This information will likely be passed on a net set up specifically to handle this traffic. If you can help there, please do. Remember there will likely be a moratorium on welfare traffic going into the storm area but not out of the storm area.

As a final note, I want to say thank you for all the relays I had from Arkansas Section stations. It was wonderful to have your support.