

2009 Simulated Emergency Test

October 3-4

The ARRL Simulated Emergency Test is a nationwide exercise in emergency communications, administered by ARRL Field Organization Leaders including Emergency Coordinators, District Emergency Coordinators, Section Emergency Coordinators and Net Managers. Many other Section Leaders like the Section Manager and the Section Traffic Manager may have a hand in planning the exercises and/or reviewing the results. Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES), National Traffic System (NTS), Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES) and other public-service oriented groups can be involved. The SET weekend gives communicators the opportunity to focus on the emergency-communications capability within your community while interacting with NTS nets. Although the main SET weekend this year is October 3-4, local and section-wide exercises may be held throughout the fall season.

During September, the ARRL will be among dozens of organizations and agencies taking part in National Preparedness Month. "The Ready Campaign," produced by the Ad Council in partnership with the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS), is aimed at making citizen preparedness "a priority for every city, every neighborhood and every home" in the US. The ARRL encourages you to consider this year's Simulated Emergency Test and preparations for it as a demonstration of Amateur Radio's readiness and as an active participant in National Preparedness Month.

<http://www.ready.gov/>, <http://www.ready.gov/america/npm09/index.html>.

How to Join the SET

To participate in this year's emergency test, contact your local ARRL emergency coordinator or net manager to find out the details. ARRL Sections, ARES teams and nets may conduct their exercises anytime during September through December. If you don't know who to call, please touch base with your ARRL Section Manager for assistance. See page 16 of *QST* for contact information or check the ARRL Web page. The URL to start with is <http://www.arrl.org/sections/>. From there, you'll find links to ARRL section home pages with names and contact information for your Section Leaders including the Section Emergency Coordinator and Section Traffic Manager. Whether you're a new licensee or an experienced radio amateur, the SET is a golden opportunity to learn or practice useful skills in traffic handling, net operation and emergency communications protocols and management.

Purpose of SET

1. To find out the strengths and weaknesses of ARES, NTS, RACES and other groups in providing emergency communications.
2. To provide a public demonstration--to served agencies such as the American Red Cross, the emergency management agency and through the news media--of the value to the public that Amateur Radio provides, particularly in time of need.
3. To help radio amateurs gain experience in communications using standard procedures and a variety of modes under simulated-emergency conditions.

Format

The scoring format reflects broad objectives and encourages use of digital modes for handling high-volume traffic and point-to-point Welfare reports out of the affected simulated- disaster area.

Participants will find SET an opportunity to strengthen the VHF-HF link at the local level, thereby ensuring that ARES and NTS are working in concert. The SET will give all levels of NTS the chance to handle exercise-related traffic. The guidelines also recognize tactical traffic on behalf of served agencies.

Test messages should carry the word "TEST" before the precedence; that is, "Test Priority" on phone and "TEST P" on cw. The text of such messages should also begin with the words "TEST MESSAGE."

ARES units and other groups are free to conduct their emergency exercises anytime between September and December if an alternative date is preferred. The activity period should not exceed 48 hours.

Links to SET reporting forms and the EC Annual Report may be found at <http://www.arrl.org/FandES/field/forms/>. You may e-mail your SET summaries to ARRL Headquarters via sewald@arrl.org. If you mail them to ARRL via the postal service, the address is: ARRL Headquarters, 225 Main Street, Newington, CT 06111-1494. February 1, 2010, is the receipt deadline.

Preparation is Important

Steps for the Emergency Coordinator

1. Sign up all available amateurs in the area under your jurisdiction and work them into your SET plans.
2. Call a meeting of all ARES members and prospective members to briefly outline (no details!) SET activities, and give general instructions. Do not divulge the exact time or nature of the test to them at this time. This should come as a surprise. Take this opportunity to register new ARES members and get up-to-date information on others. Hold an on-the-air meeting if it's not possible to meet in person.
3. Contact served agencies and explain the intent and overall purpose of the SET. Offer to send test messages to other branches of their agencies, and invite officials to your ARES meetings and SET operating sites.
4. Contact officials of any adjacent communities having no active amateurs and offer to provide representation in amateur networks for them as well.
5. Arrange publicity in consultation with an ARRL Public Information Officer in local newspapers and radio/TV stations by preparing an announcement and/or inviting the press to observe your group's SET operation.
6. Set up liaison with one or more NTS local/section nets (if you don't already have liaison) so you will have an outlet for all messages out of the local area.
7. Formulate your plans around a simulated disaster. Possible "plots" include: a flood, a serious fire, an ice storm, a missing person, a serious accident (automobile, bus, aircraft, for examples), a broken gas line, and so forth. Elaborate on the situation by developing a scenario, but please be realistic.

During the SET

1. Announce the emergency situation. Activate the emergency net. Dispatch mobiles to served agencies.
2. Have designated stations originate messages on behalf of served agencies. Test messages may

be sent simulating requests for supplies. Simulated emergency messages (just like real emergency messages) should be signed by an authorized official.

3. Emphasize tactical communications for served agencies.
4. As warranted by traffic loads, have liaison stations on hand to receive traffic on the local net and relay to your section net. You should also be sure that there is a representative on each session of the section net to receive traffic going to the local area.
5. Operate at least one session (or substantial segment of a session) of the local net on emergency-only basis. Or, if a repeater is on emergency power, allow only emergency-powered stations to operate through the repeater for a certain time period.

After the SET

An important post-SET activity is a critique session to discuss the test results. All ARES (and RACES) members should be invited to the meeting to review good points and weaknesses apparent in the drill. Emphasize ways to improve procedures, techniques, and coordination with all groups involved. Report your group's effort using the appropriate forms and include any photos, clippings and other items of interest.

The Role of NTS

The main function of the National Traffic System in an emergency situation is to tie together all of the various local activities and to provide a means by which all traffic destined outside of a local area, section or region can be systematically relayed to the addressee.

Normal NTS routing should be followed. A valid exception is the handling of emergency traffic that should be routed as rapidly and efficiently as possible, bypassing various levels of nets when delivery can be expedited. Another exception is when one station is loaded down with traffic for one region or section. At the discretion of the Net Control Station (NCS), the station may be directed to bypass a normal channel and go directly to a lower (or higher) echelon net.

The interface between NTS and ARES lies in the liaison function between local nets and other NTS nets, particularly at the section level. Responsibility for representation of the local network on the section net lies with the local net manager who may or may not be the EC. Although we usually think of ARES members being the representatives in section nets, it is equally valid to expect NTS personnel to act as liaison to local nets.

At least one net session or substantial segment of a session should be conducted on emergency power. Plan a surprise session or two. Advise the NCS just before net time. If NCS is unable to operate on emergency power, then someone else must be net control. Only stations operating on emergency power may report in during this time.

Summary

One of the first steps on the way to a successful SET is to try to get as many people involved as possible, and especially new hams. In a real emergency, we find amateurs with all sorts of varied interests coming out of the woodwork. Let's get them involved in SET so they will know more about how emergency communications should be handled. Promote SET on nets and repeaters, and sign up new, enthusiastic radio amateurs. Many of those offering to help will be inexperienced in public-service activities. It's up to you to explain what's going on to them, and provide them with useful roles. They may like it so much that they become a permanent fixture in your ARES or NTS group.

For a review of last year's nationwide Simulated Emergency Test, read the article in July, 2009, *QST*.

Thanks to your efforts, the public service tradition in Amateur Radio continues!

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