

Procedures for running the ARES/RACES Harford EmComm weekly training net:

Note: This document is a rough operational guideline for routine net use. It is not all-encompassing, nor does it make provision for realtime adaptation to an emergency situation. Those adaptations will be the responsibility of an experienced net control station. This document is to be used in conjunction with a separate net preamble and net report form.

- 1) Open the net on time. If you are scheduled to be the Net Control Station (NCS) and cannot make the net, try to inform someone else and ask them to take the net for you. Monitor the net frequency a few minutes before net time to make sure there are no other QSOs in progress, or ask if the frequency is in use. Nets do not have precedence over normal amateur traffic, even if ragchews. If the net repeater or frequency is busy with ordinary amateur traffic, simply wait until they clear, then open the net, making a note of the time the net actually opened.
- 2) Briefly announce the net using the ARES or RACES script provided separately. Mention your call, your name, and the fact you are net control. Note there are separate scripts for ARES and RACES nets – use the proper one! Note also if you are running a RACES net, you are limited to a one hour session, unless operating under a 72 hour grant or activated for an emergency in which case there is no RACES time limit.
- 3) Ask if any member has emergency or priority traffic to be listed. If so, have them list their traffic and handle it immediately in the appropriate manner. If in an emergency situation, and especially if on FM simplex or HF where some stations may hear differently than others, ask if there are any relays. It is important to do this early on, especially if in an emergency situation.
- 4) Ask for a station to serve as an alternate net control station. If no one volunteers, assign someone.
- 5) Ask if there are any liaison stations on frequency. During normal training nets there generally will not be. If we are activated, there may be. You may need to assign liaisons to MEPN, BTN, nets in other counties, tactical nets, etc. If part or all of the MDC Emergency Response Plan is active, NCS may

assign liaisons based on their ability to operate the necessary liaison modes/frequencies/bands, rather than soliciting volunteers.

- 6) Ask for any check-ins 'WITH TRAFFIC'. Use the provided Net Report Form, or use one of your own design. A Net Report Form provides a needed and efficient method of knowing who is listing traffic, and for where. If conditions warrant, ask for relays. Note here: 'Traffic' consists of formal traffic, informal traffic or announcements. When a station checks in with traffic, ask him to list his traffic and be prepared to handle it appropriately according to precedence and situation.
- 7) Ask for any check-ins, with or without traffic. If you anticipate a lot of check-ins, one way to handle this in an orderly manner is to ask for check-ins alphabetically by call suffix, i.e. 'Check-ins suffix Alpha through Mike', 'Check-ins Lima through Zulu', then open to any check-ins. You also can ask for check-ins by geographic areas or types of sites such as shelters, EOC, other counties, etc. You, as NCS, are free to use whatever you deem most efficient for the specific net in your specific situation, which can be different in routine nets versus actual EmComm operation. Ask for relays if appropriate.
- 8) Acknowledge each station individually who has checked in, using their full call sign and greeting them by name if you know it. If you do not recognize the station, don't know their name, don't know their location, not sure you got their call correctly etc., ask them to fill in missing information phonetically. This is for your benefit and your written record and net report as well as to introduce new stations to the rest of the net.
- 9) If anyone has listed announcements for the net, have them read their announcement. When they are finished, ask if anyone has any questions or needs any fills. If so, have the person with the announcement give the fill.
- 10) Recap any traffic listed and ask if anyone can handle any of it. Repeat this every so often during the net, especially if additional members check in. Handle traffic according to procedure, training and the particular situation. Remember, the job of most nets is to move traffic, so be aggressive and repetitive. You never know when a blast of incoming traffic may happen during a serious situation and bog you down, so make dispatching and clearing all traffic a priority. You want a 'clean slate' as much as possible.

- 11) Make repeated calls for additional net check-ins. Keep fishing. No one likes to wait, and in a crisis situation may not be able to. Deliberately leave long pauses between transmissions to give breakers, new check-ins, returning liaison stations, etc. a chance to get in.
- 12) Handle any net business (training, etc.).
- 13) Keep 'looping above steps (10, 11 and 12) until all traffic is handled and net business is completed.
- 13) Optionally, call on each station checked in, in turn, for comments. Some nets take comments, especially low key training nets. Others, like busy traffic nets, do not take comments but dismiss stations as their traffic is cleared and there is no need for them to remain on the net any longer. As we generally always are in training mode unless participating in an actual disaster scenario, asking for questions and feedback probably is a good idea. Some may not speak up unless specifically asked to do so. Doing this is at your discretion.
- 14) Ask if any final check-ins, or final business. If any, handle. If none, close the net per script. As NCS, you may close the net and dismiss all stations at once, or dismiss each one individually. Dismissing individually gives each member one last chance if they have a comment or question to pose. Your discretion.
- 15) Prepare your net report consisting of, at a minimum, number of check-ins, number of pieces of traffic handled, training issues covered, total duration of net. It is preferable to include callsigns of stations who checked in, together with their status (WA3XXX/NCS, KB3ABC/ANC, WX3XYZ/mobile etc.). Include names and locations of any stations not known to the net. Keep a record of all this information, especially if the net was called for other than routine purposes. Customary practice is to file this net report with the Net Manager (NM) within 48 hours. Filing via email or Radiogram is acceptable. The NM, for now (until we are large enough to have a dedicated Net Manager) is the EC for both ARES and RACES nets. If any question on net statistics, verify with your ANC.

Notes:

The above is dynamic and may evolve or change according to circumstances.

YOU are the boss. Be firm, maintain discipline, stick to the routine, but always be courteous. Nets are not democracies.

Mobile, portable, emergency power and QRP stations have priority. Put mobiles at the top of the rotation list since they may drive out of range. Do the same with stations on battery power (handhelds) as they may lose power over a long net.

Breaking stations have instant, unquestioned priority. Acknowledge breakers immediately. If they have priority traffic, handle it appropriately. Otherwise, meet their needs as appropriate and place them in rotation with other stations.

Keep transmissions short. Allow time (several seconds) before picking up the conversation to give breakers a chance to get in. Ask frequently for any new check-ins. If you are on a repeater, be certain to remain aware of the repeater timer and allow it to reset as needed. I recommend setting the timeout timer on all your FM radios to 90 or 120 seconds, which is a long transmission yet shorter than the timer on any repeater.

Make all feel welcome, valued and an important part of the activity. This especially is true of newcomers. Psychic income is a very powerful motivator. Remember: praise in public, correct in private.

Alternate Net Controls (ANC) are to make a written list of all check-ins, traffic listed and handled, anything else pertinent, and be ready to provide realtime or after-action fills to NCS or take over for him if something would prevent him from continuing as net control. It is appropriate for the alternate to bring something to the attention of the NCS should he forget or overlook something. Two sets of ears are valuable.

An NCS needs to know the basic dispatch syntax for traffic. This is simple to learn yet often is overlooked. 'WA3SWS (call) WB0EGR HERE EOC ONE' means WA3SWS, call WB0EGR here (on this frequency) and receive one piece of traffic for the EOC. HERE is replaced with frequency if the stations are sent off the repeater to pass their traffic. SWS initiates the call since he was the first station addressed in the dispatch. SWS acknowledges "going" followed by EGR in the order of the dispatch if they are sent off repeater. This protocol prevents doubling

among trained operators. Full callsigns always should be used in the dispatch. Another example might be 'W3YVT call WA3SWS HERE, FALLSTON ONE'.

Remember the 4 steps to the traffic process. Check in stations, list traffic, assign traffic (which may be by default for liaisons), dispatch traffic. The last may be postponed until after announcements or bulletin transmissions as announcements should catch all stations before you may send them off to another frequency to pass traffic.

Train all stations to ask for permission before transmitting ANYTHING. If a station has a helpful hint, correction, whatever, they should so indicate by 'tail ending' their call suffix during the frequent pauses. NCS will acknowledge the station calling and give him permission to speak when appropriate. NCS should be alert to the potential for doubles at all times and do whatever necessary to keep order.

The NCS (YOU!) is there to ensure all net business listed by any station is handled with the least amount of overhead and to execute the format and mission of the net per guidelines. A good NCS is transparent. He expedites, and remains audibly calm and in control so as to inspire confidence in all stations on the net.

Ask the persons in charge if any questions, comments or suggestions.

Prepared 2 February 2005 by WA3SWS, Steve@swssec.com, for Harford County (MD) ARES. Comments solicited.