Traffic and Message Handling Basics
Part 1 of 2 Parts by Stephen Reynolds W4CNG
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North Fulton A.R.E.S. Net

During various Disasters and SET Drills messaging handling can and will consume up to 50% of the airtime in one form or another. Depending on where you are in the drill or disaster will depend on how high this percentage will be at a given time. Early on in the staging and set-up process, very little traffic will be handled. Operators are being called, moving to locations, staging in locations, getting set-up to begin handling traffic. As you get closer to making contact with the various government and civil authorities, the chances of handling traffic goes up. Finally when you are in operation, traffic will begin to flow.

In order to handle traffic efficiently, first we must look at how the traffic is formatted before it is handled and routed. This short program will look at traffic origination or the basics of gathering the information, and formatting that communication to be transmitted from one point to another. Traffic is handled in this manner because in most cases conventional forms of communication are not available between the points of need. So, radio communications will bridge that gap. Bridging that gap effectively and efficiently is what traffic handling is all about.

Every Formal Radiogram or Disaster Welfare message originated should contain the following component parts in the following order to insure timely and accurate delivery.

A. Preamble: Number, begin each month or year with message 1, those that originate from your station. If you do not originate a lot of traffic, start with 1 at the beginning of the year.
1. Precedence: Routine, Welfare, Priority or EMERGENCY.
2. Handling instructions: One of seven categories including return receipts.
3. Station of origin: The first Amateur Handler, who originated it.
4. Check: How many words in the message. This insures the message is intact, like a parity check in data. In the case of a Disaster Welfare Message it will be one of 7 preformed messages.
5. Place of origin: Where it came from.
6. Time filed: When it originated (optional with the originating station).
7. Date: Must agree with date of time filed.

B. Address: This must be as complete as possible, include telephone number (remember new AC's), Zip codes.

C.   Text: Keep this as short as possible, preferable under 25 words.
D. Signature: Who sent the message.

In part one we will deal with the first block of information, the Preamble. First this block contains all of the handling and routing information for the message including urgency.

1.   The number is your own personal counter for traffic in a given month or year. For folks not handling lots of traffic, yearly numbering is fine. You must keep a written copy of all traffic for 2 years following your handling of it.
(I have provided an electronic copy of the Radiogram and Message form on the North Fulton A.R.E.S Web site for your use. It may be easier to print copies of this rather than get a pad of ARRL supplied forms. The electronic forms print out one per 8.5x11 inch sheet of paper.)

2. Precedence. Routine and welfare are the two lowest priorities of traffic. Their handling will occur after priority, and Emergency is of top priority. Emergency traffic is always handled first, even interrupting all but other existing Emergency traffic on a given net operation.

3. Handling instructions HX-: (This is optional especially if the message is delivered to the final destination who is also an Amateur.) This category provides a statement of what is to be done with the message when it arrives at the delivery point. There are 7 options ranging from Collect Phone call to recipient to discard if any problems are encountered.

4. Station of Origin: The call letters of the Originating station. This provides a path back to the originator by call sign incase of problems.

5. Check: A total of the number of words making up the message. The total message should be limited to less than 25 words if possible. This helps reduce errors, and shortens the handling time at each transport point. The use of ARL numbered message texts can greatly reduce the thru-put and then be compiled into a complete message by the final delivery station.

6. Place of origin: This is not necessarily the location of the person or station originating the message.

7. Time filed: This can be optional with the originating station, especially with low priority traffic.

8. Date: This must agree with the date of time filed, if the time is filed in the previous box.

All of the above items make up the Preamble of any RadioGram or Amateur Radio Disaster Welfare Message. Getting all of these items filled in correctly insures that the message will get to the end recipient in the shortest possible time, based on the priority of the message.

End of Part 1