Simulated Emergency Test – S.E.T.

Adapted from Waller County Ares Training
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The ARRL Simulated Emergency Test (SET) is a nationwide exercise in emergency communications, administered by ARRL Emergency Coordinators and Net Managers. Both ARES and the National Traffic System (NTS) are involved. The SET weekend gives communicators the opportunity to focus on the emergency communications capability within their community while interacting with NTS nets. SET weekend is usually in October. The Simulated Emergency Test (SET) is a must-do for any serious amateur involved in emergency communications.

Purpose of SET

1. To find out the strengths and weaknesses of ARES and NTS, the Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES) and other groups in providing emergency communications.
2. To provide a public demonstration--to served agencies such as Red Cross, Civil Preparedness, 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.

SET Format

The scoring format reflects broad objectives and encourages recruitment of new hams and the use of digital modes for handling high-volume traffic and point-to-point Welfare reports from 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 together. 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.

ARES units and other groups are free to conduct their SETs anytime between September 1 and November 30 if an alternative date to the designated weekend is preferred. The activity period should not exceed 48 hours. The deadline for ARRL HQ receipt of all reports is the following January 31. A complete array of reporting forms are automatically mailed to affected ARRL Field Organization appointees, and can be furnished to other groups upon request.

Preparing for SET

Emergency Coordinators sign up all available amateurs in their area and work them into the SET plans. They make special efforts to attract new hams as potential ARES members.
A meeting of all ARES members and prospective members is called to briefly outline SET activities, and give general instructions. ECs 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 ARES meetings and SET operating sites. Publicity is arranged in consultation with an ARRL Public Information Officer with local newspapers and radio/TV stations.

During the SET

The "emergency" situation is announced and the emergency net is activated. Stations are dispatched to served agencies. 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. However, it is vitally important that all test messages be preceded and ended with a statement to the effect that it is a "drill" or "practice" or "simulated" message. Otherwise, members of the public or news agencies with scanners might mistake the messages for the real thing. Tactical communications for served agencies is emphasized.

At least one session (or substantial segment of a session) of a normal local net should be conducted to directly simulate emergency communications. For instance, if a repeater is on emergency power, only emergency-powered stations should be allowed 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 strengths and weaknesses made apparent in the drill.

NTS in SET
The main function of NTS 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.

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.

At least one net session or substantial segment of a session should be conducted on emergency power. A surprise session or two should be conducted.

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. 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 hams.

With homeland security issues upon our minds over the past year, Amateur Radio operators have continued to perform in commendable fashion. Thanks to your efforts, the public service tradition continues!