

Section 4: What Happens When Called

Topic 19

Setting Up, Initial Operations, and Shutdown

Objectives

Welcome to Topic 19.

Following completion of this topic, you will be able to implement the steps necessary to set up, begin, and end operations in temporary locations, such as shelters in schools or churches, or temporary command centers at any location.

Student Preparation required:

None.

Responding After the Activation

If you already have your assignment, confirm that it is being activated by monitoring and checking into the local activation net. If you do not have a standing assignment, you should check into an activation net and make yourself available for an assignment. It might be a “resource” logistics net if one is active, or the general “tactical” command activation net. (Because local procedures vary widely, you should get to know your group’s specific plans and procedures well in advance.)

After you have gathered your equipment and supplies, filled the gas tank, and are ready to respond, you may need to do several things, depending on local plans and the nature of the emergency. You may be asked to check in to a specific net to let them know you are en route, and then periodically to report your progress, particularly if travel is hazardous.

In some cases, you may be asked to proceed to a “staging” or “volunteer intake” area to wait for an assignment. This could take some time, especially if the situation is very confused. Often, the development of the response to the emergency is unclear and it will take some time to develop a cohesive and uniform response plan for that incident. As each incident is unique, you should expect the situation to be fluid, and respond accordingly. Be prepared to wait patiently for a determination to be made and an assignment to be given. In other cases, such as the immediate

aftermath of a tornado or earthquake, you may be forced to make expedient arrangements as you go. Travel may be difficult or impossible, so you may need to do what you can, where you can. Nets may be established on an ad-hoc basis using whatever means are available.

Who Is in Charge

At each station, the EC or other emergency communications manager should appoint one member of the emergency communications group to take a leadership role as “station manager,” with full responsibility for all operations at that site. This person serves as a point of contact, information, and decisions for the team with the incident commander and with other groups aiding in the response. This helps avoid confusion and arguments.

When you accept a position as an emergency communications volunteer, you do so knowing that you will often need to follow the directions of another person. Cooperation and good teamwork are key elements that result in an efficient and effective emergency communications operation. As the situation develops, you may have to step into a role of a leader to keep the operation moving forward. Expect to work with others. Expect that there are times when it is appropriate for you to be the follower. Expect that other times you may be the leader.

Arriving at the Site

If you are assigned to a facility operated by the partners, such as a shelter, introduce yourself to the person in charge as an “emergency communicator” assigned to serve that location. They will be busy, so get right to the point.

Identify yourself and explain that you have been assigned to set up a communication station for that location, and by whom.

Inform them that you would like to set up your equipment and get on the air. Ask if another communicator has already arrived. Ask if they have a preference for the station’s location and explain your needs.

If you are the first communicator to arrive, be prepared to suggest an appropriate location — one that can serve as both an operating and message desk, has feed line access to a suitable antenna location, has access to power and telephone, and is isolated just enough from the command center for operators to avoid disturbing each other.

Ask if there are any hazards or considerations in the immediate area that you should be aware of, or may cause you to have to relocate later.

If no building or other suitable shelter is available, you may need to set up your own tent or work from your car. Choose a location that provides shelter from wind, precipitation, and other hazards, and is close enough to the partners’ operations to be convenient but not in each other’s way.



Being a Good Guest

In many cases, you will be occupying a space that is normally used by someone else for another purpose. Respect and protect their belongings and equipment in every way possible. For instance, if you are in a school and will be using a teacher's desk, find a way to remove all the items from its surface to a safe place for the duration of operations. A cardboard box sealed and placed under the desk usually works well. Do not use their office supplies or equipment or enter desk drawers or other storage areas without specific permission from a representative of the building's owners. Some served agencies will seal all filing cabinets, drawers, and doors to certain rooms with tamper-evident tape upon arrival to protect the host's property and records.

When installing antennas, equipment, and cables, take care not to damage anything. For instance, avoid using duct tape to fasten cables to walls or ceilings, because its removal will usually damage the surface. If damage is caused for any reason, make note of it in your log and report it to the appropriate person as soon as possible.

Initial Setup and Information Gathering

In most cases, your first priority will be to set up a basic station to establish contact with the net. Pack that equipment in your vehicle last so that you can get to it first. If you arrive as a team of two or more, station setup can begin while others carry in the remaining equipment.

Set up and test the antenna for proper SWR, and then check into the net. Test to find the lowest power setting that produces reliable communication, especially if you are operating with battery or generator power, to conserve power for extended operations. High power should also be avoided whenever lower power will work just as well to prevent interference with other radio systems, telephones, and electronic equipment.

Once your basic station is on the air, you can begin to work on other needs:

- Check for working telephones, faxes, internet, and other means of communication
- Learn about the partner's operations and immediate needs at that site
- Install additional stations or support equipment
- Make a list of stations within simplex range
- Identify possible alternative message paths
- Find sanitary facilities
- Determine water and food sources, eating arrangements
- Review overall conditions at the site and how they will affect your operations
- Find a place to get some occasional rest

As soon as possible, ask a member of the partner's staff to spend a few moments to discuss the partner's operational needs. What are the most critical needs? Whom do they need to communicate with, and what sort of information will need to be transmitted? Will most messages be short and tactical in nature or consist of long lists? Will any messages be too confidential for radio? Are phones and fax still working? What will traffic needs be at different times of day? How long is the site anticipated to be open? Will there be periodic changes in key partner staff?

You may also need to provide partner staff with some basic information on how to create a message, show them how to use message forms, and instruct them on basic procedures to follow. Be sure to let them know that their communications will not be private and "secure" if sent by Amateur Radio and discuss possible alternatives.

Ending Operations

Emergency communications operations may end all at once or be phased out over time. Several factors may affect which operations end, and when:

- Damaged communication systems are restored and returned to service
- Traffic loads are reduced and can be handled with normal systems
- Shelters and other locations are closed

How you are notified to end operations will depend on the policies of your emergency communications group and partners, and on the specific situation. For instance, even though a shelter manager has been told to shut down by the partners, your orders may normally come from a different person who may not be immediately aware of the shelter's closing. In this case, you might need to check with the appropriate emergency communications manager before closing your station. Once the decision to close your station has been received and verified, be sure that the person in charge of the location is aware that you are doing so, and if necessary,

why.

File and package all messages, logs, and other paperwork for travel. Return any borrowed equipment or materials. Carefully remove all antennas and equipment, taking care to package and store them correctly and safely. Avoid the temptation to toss everything into a box with the intention to “sort it out later,” unless you are under pressure to leave in a hurry. In the event you are redeployed quickly, this will save time in the end.

Departure

Several actions may be necessary when leaving. First, be sure to leave the space you used in as good a condition as possible. Clean up any messes, remove trash, and put any furniture or equipment back where it was when you arrived. If you sealed desktop items in a box for safekeeping, simply place the box on the cleaned desk. Do not unpack the items and attempt to replace them on the desk. This will provide proof to the desk’s owner that you took steps to protect their belongings, and it helps keep them secure until their owner takes possession again. Do not remove tamper-evident tape or similar seals placed by others unless told to do so by the appropriate person, or in accordance with the partner’s policy.

Thank all those who worked with you. Even a simple “thanks” is preferable to nothing. Do not forget the building’s owners or staff, the partner’s staff, or others you worked with, and any other emergency communications personnel. This is also the time for any apologies. If things did not always go well, or if any damage was caused, do your best to repair the relationship before departing. These simple efforts can go a long way toward protecting relationships between all groups and individuals involved.

The Debriefing

After each operation, your emergency communications group, and perhaps even the partners, will probably want to hold a meeting to review the effectiveness of the operation. There may be issues or events that occurred during operations that you will want to discuss at this meeting. Events may have occurred within the partner organization that involved communications you handled. If you try to rely entirely on your memory or logbooks, you will probably forget key details or even forget certain events altogether.

Keep a separate “debriefing” diary specifically for use during this meeting. Some entries might only refer briefly to specific times and dates in the station operating log, or they may contain details that are not appropriate in the station log.

If you will be required to turn over your station logs immediately at the end of operations, your debriefing diary will need to contain full details of all events and issues for discussion. Such information might include:

- What was accomplished
- Whether anything is still pending (Note unfinished items for follow-up)

- What worked well (Keep track of things that worked in your favor)
- What needed improvement
- Ideas to solve known problems in the future
- Key events
- Conflicts and resolutions

During the debriefing, organize the session into (a) what worked well, and (b) what could be improved for the next operation. Change criticisms and judgment statements into a constructive manner by saying, “This method might have worked better if…” rather than “This method was stupid.” Also, avoid personal attacks and finger-pointing. In most cases, interpersonal issues are dealt with most effectively away from the group meeting.

Reference Links

ARRL Public Service Communications

www.arrl.org/files/file/Public%20Service/ARES/ARESmanual2015.pdf

The ARES Field Resources Manual

www.arrl.org/files/file/ARES_FR_Manual.pdf

Review

The process of setting up, operating, and taking down your station should be an orderly and thoughtful one. A little advance planning can save considerable time. From the very first minute, work closely with the partner’s personnel to pick a location for your station, and learn what their operational needs are. Protect the building and its contents in every way possible. Log all events and issues for discussion in the post-event debriefing.

Activities

1. Suppose that you were given the assignment of coaching a new member of your emergency communications group. Describe six rules you would teach the new member regarding behavior at a partner’s emergency communications event.
2. It is always a good idea to pack the equipment needed to get on the air right away in your vehicle last so that you can get to it first. Consider all the gear that you might need for a three-day emergency communications assignment. Describe how you might load your gear in a vehicle.
3. Develop a checklist of actions you should take upon arrival if you were assigned to a different partner during an emergency communications event.
4. Develop a checklist of actions you should take before departing a partner at the

conclusion of an emergency communications event. Describe these actions.

Welcome to Topic 19 Knowledge Review

Please review the following questions to improve your understanding of this topic:

Question 1:

Suppose that you have been activated during an emergency and have been told to report to a partner that is different from your usual assignment. Which of the following is your best course of action upon arriving at the new partner?

- a) Take charge and set up a communication center right away.
- b) Check around the site and find the best place to set up a communication center.
- c) Ask the receptionist about the best location for setting up a communication center.
- d) Introduce yourself to the person in charge as the emergency communicator assigned to that location.

Question 2:

You are to brief the staff of a partner about privacy on Amateur Radio. Which of the following is the most accurate statement you can make?

- a) Speaking quietly into a microphone ensures that no one will overhear private information.
- b) It is permissible to use code words to ensure privacy on the air.
- c) There is no privacy with Amateur Radio voice communications.
- d) There are *no* methods by which the security of any message can be ensured on Amateur Radio.

Question 3:

Suppose that you have been assigned to a site and the emergency ends. If the site manager asks you to close your station, what is your best course of action?

- a) Do as the site manager tells you and close down your station immediately.
- b) Ignore the site manager and await further instructions from higher authority.
- c) Check in with the emergency communications manager or NCS before closing down.
- d) Have your emergency communications manager or NCS speak directly with the site manager before you take any action.

Question 4:

In preparing to leave a site after an emergency communications event, which of the following actions is *not* appropriate?

- a) Clean up any mess, discard trash, and move furniture back to its original position.
- b) Unpack all desk items that you have placed in boxes and put them back in their original locations.
- c) Thank all of those who worked with you.
- d) Repair any relationships that may have been strained during the event.

Question 5:

A debriefing should be scheduled after each emergency communications event. What is the primary purpose of the debriefing?

- a) It provides an occasion to swap “war stories.”
- b) It serves as a legitimate forum for complaints.
- c) It serves to improve future emergency communications activities.
- d) It provides an occasion for resolving interpersonal issues.