

Basic Communications Skills

Chapter Four

By

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Beyond understanding net procedures and other emergency operations protocol, it is important to have formed good communications habits and skills. One is to exhibit courtesy and consideration. One thing to keep in mind is that no one owns a frequency. You may arrive on a frequency where your net normally meets. You do not ask those using the frequency to move but you may enter the conversation and let them know that you have a net that normally meets there and you would like to move the net to a different frequency. Most often if a “rag chew” session is going on they will tell you to go ahead with your net and they will move. If they are unwilling to move they will give you an opportunity to move your people. At that point just announce to the net that you are going up at least 5 KHz and will move up and will call the net at the first open frequency. If you are operating a net and someone moves in a couple of KHz above you’re net and they are creating interference to your net have someone to go up and let them know that you have an emergency net operating 2 KHz down and they are making operations difficult for the net and ask if they could move up a couple more KHz. Do not insult them for operating close to your net. An example of what not to do would be to say “you idiots, we have been operating an emergency net for the past two hours and you have moved in right on top of us.” This kind of comment will not gain you the cooperation that you are seeking. If you can’t get someone to move away from your net try to move your net a KHz or two away from them. All rigs have a VFO knob and you can move away from interference.

Be sure that you always listen on a frequency prior to transmitting. On HF you may only be able to hear one side of a conversation so ask, “Is this frequency in use” prior to transmitting. The station that can hear you will usually say, “yes it is, thanks for asking.”

If you move into a disaster area and find a repeater that might assist in extending your range and assist your operation, try to check with the repeater owner and gain his or their permission prior to prolonged use of their repeater. This may not always be possible. The trustee may have evacuated the area. This is another reason that it is important to take a “Repeater Directory” in your “go bag” or communications trailer. These directories list not only the repeater but also the sponsoring person or group.

Develop good microphone technique. This means proper spacing when speaking into your mike. If you are too close and your deviation is too high on a FM rig it

will cause you to over deviate and will crowd the limiters on the repeater and will create clipping. Place the mic at 90 degrees to your mouth and speak across the microphone rather than directly into it. This will reduce breath sounds when you communicate. Some of the rigs that have VHF/UHF and HF on the same rig, require a mic adjustment when moving into and out of the HF mode (from FM to SSB).

When someone asks you how their rig sounds give them an honest response. If you tell them that the rig “sounds great” when they have an AC hum or other problem, you are not doing them a favor by giving them an OK report. Be kind but honest.

When passing verbal traffic, remember that faster may turn out to be slower. If people have to ask you to repeat information, that will actually make the traffic move slower. Remember that someone on the other end has to write your information and in some cases may have to give thought to how to spell some of the words. All of us have listened to messages on our phone answering machine and had to replay a phone number a number of times to figure out what was being said. Some people have the same habit when it comes to passing traffic on the air. The proper way to pass verbal traffic is to speak a few words and then pause. An example, “we have 4 relief operators <pause> that will be leaving Richmond <pause> Monday August 26th at 1800 hours<pause> will arrive at Disasterville on Tuesday<pause> will need cots for these 4 workers.” Some messages such as a bulletin are generally read at “reading speed”. This is a general announcement to the entire net and is not supposed to be copied verbatim. In a message, if you come to a word that may be misunderstood then spell the word using the phonetic alphabet. Before you spell begin with the pro-word, “I spell” and then start your spelling. Never use the pro-words “common spelling” there is no such thing as “common spelling”.

If you are passing a non-formal message, be brief and to the point. The rule is brevity and clarity. Extraneous comments can be distracting and lead to misunderstanding. If someone else has given you a message that might not be easily understood work with the person on revising the message to make its content clear. Speak slowly and distinctly. This becomes more critical when you are serving as a Net Control Station. The average ham is 57 years old and many of those that have the flexibility to go out on a disaster project are retired and much older than 57. This means they may have hearing difficulties so clear speech is vital.

Some people raise the question, “If I speak clearly why do I need to use the phonetic alphabet?” Not only do some letters sound alike but when phonetics are used it gives the net control more time to write calls and other information that may need to be recorded.

In disasters, ICS directs that all messaging must be in plain language. This means

that 10-codes are not to be used. This also includes the use of “Q-signals”. “Q-signals” were always intended for use when operating CW. The ARL radiogram numbers are not plain language and require a listing of what they mean and this list may not be available at a disaster location.

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