

Message Forms for SouthBears

Chapter Five

By

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Much like nets (formal and informal nets), formal and informal messages are an important part of emergency communications. The informal message may be verbal and recorded with brief notes on a station log. SouthBears uses the station log form ICS 133 for logging and this form has space to enter brief notes on verbal messages. This space should be used for message notes and other important notations. Many hams prefer to use electronic logs that capture all the same information along with additional information. One of the advantages of the electronic log is that most will allow you to quickly learn of all previous contacts with the station just entered into the log. Most of these logs will also immediately place the name, and address for the call entered into the log. The electronic logs can be printed into a hard copy of the log if required.

Formal messages are written on the ICS form ICS-213 and this is a general message form that is used by all groups participating in a NIMS operation. This form is very simple and appears much like a full-page phone message form. The SouthBears 213 doesn't provide space for a return message (a reply) to the original message. The form used by SouthBears also contains a block for precedence, and other information, which is an addition to the standard ICS format. Many other organizations use the ARRL Radiogram form. This form is more complex than the ICS-213. The Radiogram is in desperate need of revision to be usable in the way that traffic is handled today. If a message is going to be entered into the National Traffic System it is best to convert the message to a Radiogram. This format is helpful if a message is going to be subject to relay and insures that the body of the message has all the words that it started through the relay from net to net prior to delivery. Again the default form for SouthBears is the ICS-213.

Some cardinal rules for handling messages is to not speculate as to anything concerning the emergency. There may be a number of people, including the news media listening to your comments. You do not want to become a source for rumors. It is also important to transmit traffic just as it is written or spoken. If there is misspelling or grammar you are still to pass the message just as you received it. Only the original author may make corrections to the message. It is important that the message contain a signature and the title of the sender. If there is a mistake in what has been requested by the message, it is the responsibility of the person signing the message. If you are sending messages or receiving, be sure to log this into your logging sheet. If your message has been hand carried or passed to an official, your

log will give you vital information that you may need to reference later. Your log should contain the information of the name, and contact information on the sender. You will also want to log significant events that have occurred at the station while you were on duty. This would contain such things as times that you may have been away from the station; any equipment or power failures that may have occurred while you were control operator at the station. If your station is very busy, you may want to assign a second person the responsibility of logging. This person may be someone that is not a ham. If you are using headphones with a second person logging you will need to have a splitter to allow two headphones to be connected to the same transceiver.

If your location is receiving very little traffic you may want to note information in your record for all communications you are hearing on a net. This practice was very helpful during a response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005. If you are serving as an alternate net control it is necessary for you to keep a duplicate log for everything that the net control is recording. All records should be clear and legible. If you are the only one that can read your records it has limited value. A firm writing source and a clipboard can be a big help in keeping legible records. I find it helpful to have multiple clipboards that contain different forms that I might need. Keep both pens and pencils handy. There are times that one or the other works better for the application. If you are using a paper log, you should punch holes in your sheets and post them in a binder for a permanent record. (You will need a paper punch with you.)

In regard to message security and privacy, no information transmitted over the air can be considered secure or private. With Amateur Radio we are prohibited from using codes or ciphers to obscure the meaning of information sent by Amateur Radio. There are methods that can be used that make the message less likely to be decoded. This would be by using a digital mode such as PSK31, Chip64, RTTY, AMTOR, packet, pactor or Winlink. Some of these modes provide additional privacy due to compression. With a receiver and TNC, compressed messages could not be read as easy as with non-compressed data.

It is important that agencies that we serve be aware of our privacy limitations. Death messages should never be sent via Amateur Radio. This should be reserved for secure means such as phone, fax or personal delivery.