



# Western Pennsylvania Section 2009 Simulated Emergency Test



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## **1. Purpose:**

This Simulated Emergency Test will: Test the readiness of the ARRL WPA ARES Section to handle emergency communications during a communications blackout. Then, evaluate improvements made in the WPA ARES organization and practices during the preceding twelve months by comparing the results of this exercise with outcomes from previous SET exercises.

## **2. Exercise Date:**

Saturday, 31 October 2009, 0900 to 1200 Eastern Time.

## **3. Goals:**

This SET has two goals:

- a. Test the strengths and weaknesses of the WPA Section ARES system under a communications blackout.
- b. Compare the results of this exercise with the outcomes of previous SET exercises to identify organizational and system improvements made and any issues requiring further attention.

## **4. Objectives:**

- a. Maximize participation by ARES communicators.
- b. Activate all local county nets and assign a liaison station to their respective district nets.<sup>1</sup>
- c. Activate and identify district nets, coordinate county nets in their district and assign liaison stations to the WPA Section Traffic net.
- d. Activate the WPA Section Traffic Net and move traffic to and from the NTS.
- e. Encourage the use of the NBEMS<sup>2</sup> software package for digital messages and traffic.
- f. Operate as many stations as possible on emergency power.
- g. Encourage served agencies such as Red Cross and emergency government agencies to participate by passing message traffic.
- h. Activate as many Emergency Operations Center (EOC) stations as possible.
- i. Encourage media coverage of the exercise by sending press releases to local print and broadcast outlets.

## **5. Exercise Scenario:**

Last night an unusually severe winter storm originating in Ohio moved across the state. Western Pennsylvania residents are waking up this morning to discover the damaging effects of this storm. The storm dumped up to one inch of ice before turning to snow which accumulates up to 30 inches in the southern part of the state and up to 48 inches in the northern part of the state. As the storm moved through the area major roads became impassable, large portions of the commercial power grid are damaged, wired telephone communications are interrupted, the

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<sup>1</sup> Where no district net is organized, attempt to check in with an adjoining district net. If no adjoining district net is available, check in directly with the WPA Section NTS Net.

<sup>2</sup> NBEMS is the Narrow Band Emergency Messaging System. In 2008 NBEMS was adopted by the WPS Section ARES organization as the standard digital software package in an effort to assure compatibility between ARES groups. This software can be used with your existing radio equipment and a laptop or personal computer. The software is free and no adaptors or audio interfaces are required. For more information on NBEMS please contact the WPA Assistant Section Emergency Coordinator Harry Bloomberg W3YJ.

cellular telephone service has become overloaded with only isolated areas of service, and served agencies have begun establishing shelters for displaced residents. Amateur Radio remains as one of the few viable communications resource.

For the purposes of this SET, only repeaters and digital hubs with emergency power capabilities can be used. You do not have to physically cut power to these systems unless you wish to test them. Participating stations should operate on emergency power if they have the capability. Remember, participation is our goal! If you must use commercial power, this is acceptable in order to increase participation in the exercise; however, stations with emergency power should use it.

Emergency Coordinators and District Emergency Coordinators are expected to implement locally developed scenarios to compliment the WPA section scenario. Local scenarios should exercise communications for served agencies.

As a suggestion to increase activity on the local SET, you may consider having SET operators report all emergency vehicles they see--police, fire, EMS, school buses, snow plow trucks, and anything else official looking back to net control. Depending on the location of SET operators, you may be able to track the vehicles from one of your posts to the next.

## **6. General Instructions:**

### **a. ARES Members:**

1. All stations should be prepared for their local ARES group to be activated using previously established activation procedures. Once activated, you should check in with your respective County ARES net and await instructions from the local Emergency Coordinator (EC).
2. Use portable and mobile communications where possible.
3. Utilize and experiment with different modes of communications.
4. At the conclusion of the SET, you should report your station's activities to your local Emergency Coordinator for inclusion in his/her SET activity report.

### **b. Emergency Coordinators:**

- i. Prior to the SET, each EC should:
  1. Contact served agency managers in their area, explain the purpose of the SET and invite them to participate.
  2. In each locality where there is an ARES/RACES station at an EOC, contact the EOC manager and arrange for the ARES/RACES station to be active during the SET.
  3. Sign up all available amateurs in the area under your jurisdiction and work them into your SET plans.
  4. Take this opportunity to register new ARES volunteers and get up to date information on existing volunteers.
  5. Call a meeting of all ARES volunteers and prospective volunteers to vaguely outline (no details!) the SET and give general instructions. Do not divulge the exact nature of the test to ARES volunteers at this time. Hold an on-air meeting if it's not possible to meet in person.
  6. Arrange publicity in consultation with an ARRL Public Information Officer (PIO)<sup>3</sup> with local newspapers, radio stations, and television stations by

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<sup>3</sup> A list of ARRL Public Information Officers (PIO) in the Western Pennsylvania Section is included at the end of this document.

preparing an announcement. Consider inviting the press to observe your group's SET operation.

7. Submit via e-mail to your DEC and SEC a brief outline (one or two paragraphs) of your local SET plans. Be sure to include how your plans involve served agencies and what local elements tie into the section scenario. **This outline is due by Monday 5 October 2009.**

- ii. During the SET, send at a minimum his/her DEC:
  1. One formal message announcing the activation of their local emergency net. This traffic should move by pre-existing procedures to reach your District Emergency Coordinator (DEC) via the assigned liaison station.
  2. Periodic informal messages announcing the current situational status during the drill. This traffic should move from the local county-level net to the district net via the assigned liaison station.
  3. One formal message announcing the closing of their local emergency net. This traffic should move from by pre-existing procedures to reach your District Emergency Coordinator (DEC) via the assigned liaison station.
- iii. During the SET, send at a minimum each neighboring county EC:
  1. One formal message announcing the situational status during the drill in your county. This traffic should move from the local county-level net to the District Net via an assigned liaison station. If a district net is not available you may use the Section traffic net for this purpose.
  2. Periodic informal messages announcing the current situational status during the drill. This traffic should move from the local county-level net to the District Net via an assigned liaison station. If a district net is not available you may use the Section traffic net for this purpose.
  3. At least one NBEMS digital message containing at least 50 names and addresses of local residents housed in emergency shelters. This information should be relayed to the receiving county EOC or an appropriate served agency (IE: American Red Cross or a local hospital) for informational purposes. This traffic should be coordinated by your local District Net control station. Once the receiving station is aware of the waiting digital traffic Net Control will ask you to switch to a different frequency to pass your digital traffic. If a district net is not available you may use the Section traffic net for this purpose. Once contact is established switch to a different frequency to send your digital traffic.
  4. One formal message announcing the closing of your local emergency net. This traffic should move from the local county-level net to the District Net via an assigned liaison station. If a district net is not available you may use the Section traffic net for this purpose.
- iv. After the SET:
  1. Submit SET Form A to the ARRL and to the WPA SEC.
  2. Ensure the net manager submits SET Form B to the ARRL and to the WPA SEC.
- c. District Emergency Coordinators:
  - i. Prior to the SET, each DEC should:
    1. If not already in place, implement one or more district nets. This district net will provide communications between county nets and the WPA Traffic Net.
    2. If more than one district net is implemented, arrange for a relay station or link between the nets.
    3. Inform all EC's in the district details regarding the district net(s).

4. Provide requested assistance to the EC in your district to design a local scenario and implement the SET.
- ii. During the SET:
    1. One formal message to the SEC announcing the activation of the district emergency net. This traffic should move from the district-level net to the WPA Section Traffic Net via the assigned liaison station.
    2. Periodic informal messages to the SEC announcing the activation, closure, and/or status of local county nets within the district. This traffic should move from the district-level net to the WPA Section Traffic Net via the assigned liaison station.
    3. One formal message to the SEC announcing the closing of their district emergency net. This traffic should move from the district-level net to the WPA Section Traffic Net via the assigned liaison station.
  - iii. After the SET:
    1. Ensure the district net manager submits SET Form B to the ARRL and to the WPA SEC.
- d. Use established emergency communication and frequency plans. The WPA Section Phone and Traffic Net will be on 3983 KHz with a back-up frequency of 7272 KHz beginning at 0900 hours.
  - e. Use the “Simulated Emergency Test” designation in each and every message. Identify tactical communications as a “drill” or “test” as often as possible.
  - f. Assign an operator the duty of logging all local activity as well as stations participating.
  - g. For the purposes of this SET, all formal traffic should use the ARRL RADIOGRAM form.
  - h. The scenario provided here is a basic outline for the entire section. Each county is expected to expand this scenario on the local level and use other available resources. Two of the important goals are to have fun and be creative with this exercise.
  - i. The form of the county-level exercise is at the discretion of the local EC. Each EC has the option of planning a tabletop<sup>4</sup>, functional<sup>5</sup>, or full-scale<sup>6</sup> exercise.

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<sup>4</sup> Tabletop Exercise: Essentially a role-playing meeting. All participants are at the same location with one person serving as facilitator. Each participant represents various locations or functions and responds to questions from other participants. An active radio link would be necessary to connect this exercise with the district and section activities.

<sup>5</sup> Functional Exercise: Functional Exercises may utilize the same facilities as a full-scale drill but they are more limited in scope. Most participants perform their roles, while a smaller group serves as “simulators”, feeding scenarios, data, and messages into the system. Functional exercises may also be run with all participants communicating from their homes, simply adopting the roles they would otherwise have in a full-scale drill.

<sup>6</sup> Full-Scale Exercise: Full-Scale Exercise involves operators responding to EOC's, served agencies, and field locations. The goal of a full-scale exercise should be to evaluate how well all the individual components of a system work together. Consider a full-scale exercise only when individual systems or tasks have been adequately tested on a smaller scale.

Please direct questions to:

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