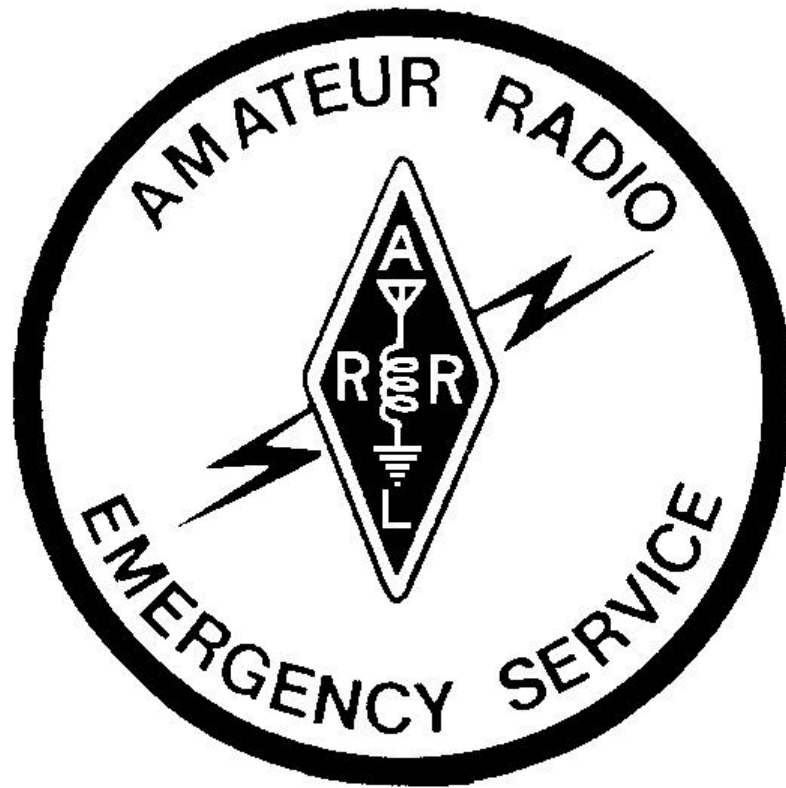


CUMBERLAND COUNTY AMATEUR RADIO EMERGENCY SERVICE



SPECIAL EVENTS COMMUNICATIONS MANUAL

**A GUIDE FOR PARTICIPATING IN SPECIAL EVENT
COMMUNICATIONS SUPPORT**

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Introduction

Special Events

‘Special event’ is a term coined by radio amateurs that refers to activities where the public is in attendance as observers and/or participants. They include sporting events such as marathons, bikeathons and boat races; fundraisers such as walkathons; celebrations such as parades; and exhibits at fairs, malls and museums. These are all affairs of a preplanned, non-emergency nature.

Special events are normally held for the enjoyment of the public and often draw large crowds. They provide golden public relations opportunities for radio amateurs who provide support communications on a complimentary basis. They make our activities visible to non-amateurs. They sharpen our operating skills, and help justify our existence. And besides, operating special events is just plain fun!

The purpose of this manual is to help Amateurs better understand special events and how to operate effectively in them.

This manual is not a singular effort. It reflects the efforts of individuals and organizations throughout the country and some portions of the ARRL’s Special Events Communications Manual (with permission).

PRIOR TO THE EVENT

Special events don’t just happen. They are well planned in advance. Event organizers look to Amateur Radio to provide a well coordinated and planned communications system to make their event a success. As stated in the introduction, special events are preplanned and non-emergency in nature. The important word here is *preplanned*. As the event is preplanned so must our communications effort. Just ‘showing up’ at a special event with a group of radio amateurs and equipment just won’t cut it. “Planning on the fly” is not the way to give a good impression of Amateur Radio. It is up to you as an Amateur Radio operator to be a part of the effort to make the event a success.

The first step is to volunteer. Event communications coordinators do not have mind reader in their job description. If they don’t know you are coming, they cannot effectively plan the communications event. In some cases, Amateur Radio participation in a special event has been cancelled due to lack of volunteers. Your help is always needed! It might be a bit of an embarrassment to show up at an event only to find you are the only Amateur Radio operator present (finding out later the event communications had been cancelled and you were never informed (due to the fact you never said you were coming)). Listen for special event announcements on the air, on nets, in club newsletters and on internet web sites, etc.. Once you plan to help out with an event, contact the event communications coordinator. They will let you know the particulars of the event. Take notes when you are talking with them. Be sure and understand when to show up and with what equipment. Be sure to let the event communications coordinator know if you are not able to stay for the whole event, he or she can usually accommodate your needs if they know in advance. It’s understood that last minute emergencies arise, but try to let the event communications coordinator know if you are not going to be able to make it for any reason as soon as possible prior to the event. Try not to tell the organizer “I’ll try to make it”, or “I’ll probably be there”. If possible, give a firm commitment. Event communications coordinators

usually don't count 'maybe's' in their planning. Try to know as much about the event in advance as you can.

Next, treat every special event as emergency communications training. Have the equipment with you that you might use in an emergency. Bring any equipment recommended by the event communications coordinator. They usually know what equipment is going to be needed for an event. Don't be afraid to let the event communications coordinator know what equipment you are lacking. Again, they can usually plan for any equipment shortfalls.

Now, make sure your equipment is in good working order. Never assume (and we all know what *assume* means) that your equipment is working. Be sure to check it out operationally before the event. There is nothing more frustrating than to show up at a special event with a handheld and a spare battery pack and find that both the battery on the handheld and the spare are nearly discharged. A good suggestion is to have not only spare nicad battery pack(s) but also an alkaline battery shell for your handheld. If your nicad packs fail, you can, in a pinch, run down to the local 'mom and pop store' and get some alkaline cells. Check out whatever equipment you are going to bring before the event to avoid frustration at the event.

Speaking of equipment, be certain you know how your equipment operates! Modern Amateur equipment is certainly not 'plug and play'. Always assume that you may have to reprogram your equipment just before the event. If you're not absolutely sure you know your equipment 'inside out', be sure to bring a copy of the operations manual with you (notice, I said a *copy*. It's not a good idea to bring the original.). Never *assume* there is going to be someone at the event to help you (that knows your equipment better than you do).

Last, but certainly not least, watch the weather forecast in the days just prior to the event. Most special events go off 'rain or shine'. Be sure to have the appropriate clothing for the event. No need to be uncomfortable when you can plan in advance.

OPERATING IN AN EVENT

First, arrive on time (or before). There is usually a lot to do before an event. You can be a great help to the event communications coordinator by arriving early to help get things in order. There is usually also another advantage to arriving early. You usually get first pick of operating locations. Arrive with the equipment you need for the event. Arrive in a presentable condition. No, you don't have to arrive in 'white tie and tails' but give a good impression of Amateur Radio. First impressions by the event organizers and officials can make it or break it for Amateur Radio and the communications we can provide. A sloppy appearance can give the event organizers, officials and staff the impression of a sloppy job (no matter how good the communications).

Upon arrival, report into the event communications coordinator. He or she should provide you maps or directions for the event, provide you with information about the event and give you an assignment. This is usually done during a communications briefing before the event begins. Be sure you understand what is expected of you. Don't be afraid to ask questions! Better to get everything cleared up before the event begins rather than after. Be sure you know where you are going. Again, when in doubt, ask! Find out where other stations are located and what their tactical call signs are. Know who the net control station is and what their tactical call sign is. If any special identification is provided, wear it. Event officials and staff have usually been told how to identify event communications personnel. They will be looking for the distinctive clothing or badges provided.

When you arrive at your assigned location, introduce yourself to the on site event staff. This is important as event officials and staff are expecting you and there is nothing more frustrating than to have an event official report they had no communications when in fact there was a communicator on site. Remember, your primary job is communications. This does not preclude you from assisting on site event officials and staff in their duties. It gives a good impression of Amateur Radio if communicators are willing to 'help out' with other tasks. Soon after your arrival, report into the net control station that you are in place. Don't keep anyone in the dark.

Operating in a net is the same whether you are in an emergency net or operating at a special event. Below are some tips when operating in a net environment. Not all of the tips below apply to special events, but as stated earlier, operate in a special event as you would during an emergency situation.

The backbone of any emergency communications or special event system is a net. The net brings some order to a communications emergency or special event. The orderly flow of information is essential during a communications emergency or special event in order to complete our mission of providing supplemental, backup communications during times of disaster and emergency. The following are tips for ARES members operating within a net.

First and foremost when operating in a net, LISTEN more than you transmit!

If you are looking for information concerning the emergency situation or special event, you can gather more by just listening than by checking in and asking questions. The NCS is usually busy and by checking in just to ask questions only tends to hamper the NCS's progress in operating the net during the emergency or special event.

1. Before checking into a net, be prepared to operate. During a communications emergency, ARES is not looking for great numbers of check-ins. Checking in 'for the count', 'in and out' or from a location a great distance from the net is of no great help. If you are not able to operate at the time, perhaps it is best to delay your check-in until a time that you are able to operate. This is not to say that you have to be able to deploy. One should assume that during a communications emergency that repeaters will not be operational. Stations are needed, operating at home to relay traffic (information) on simplex. Stations are needed at home to pick up and relay formal health and welfare traffic to various NTS traffic nets. There is a need for home stations as well as deployed stations during a communications emergency.
 - a. Ensure that your home and family are taken care of.
 - b. Ensure you have no other commitments during the emergency period (examples: reserve police, volunteer fire fighter, EMT, etc.)
 - c. Be sure that you are available for communications (either at home or as a deployed station).
2. **Listen** to the instructions of the net control station (NCS) and follow them as best you can. The NCS may be aware of things that you are not.

As mentioned, the NCS usually has the 'big picture'. He or she may be aware of other things that are going on that you may not be aware of. Listen to what the NCS is saying and try to follow his or her instructions. Give the NCS what they ask for. Try not to inject opinions or 'chit-chat' when communicating with the NCS. This may only hinder communications during the emergency.

3. Check in immediately if you have emergency traffic! Be sure to advise the NCS if you have emergency traffic.

If you have emergency traffic, by all means break into the net at any time. Emergency traffic usually involves the immediate protection of life or property or involves emergency traffic from one of our served agencies. If you have other traffic, please wait until the traffic is called for.

4. Check in when check-ins are called for. Again, there may be more going on than you are aware of.
5. When checking in, advise the NCS if you are a home station or are available for deployment. Also, advise the NCS if you have emergency power available.

Don't keep the NCS in the dark. Let them know what your availability is and if you are operating on emergency power.

6. If you are checked into a net, be available. Advise the NCS if you need to check out of the net or if you are going to be away from your station. Be sure to advise the NCS when you return. Assume nothing.

Always keep the NCS informed. Checking into the net (and/or taking an assignment) and not being available only hinders communications and gives the NCS (and our served agencies) a false sense of security as to the communications they have.

7. Do not overload yourself. Do not take on too much in the way of communications during an emergency or special event. It is better to do one job well than several jobs poorly.

During the special event use tactical call signs, if assigned. This speeds up the process of communications. Event officials are often listening and a tactical call sign is often easier for them to understand than just your Amateur Radio call sign. Remember to observe the '10 minute rule' for properly identifying your station.

Be sure not to secure your station without first checking with the net control station. In some cases, securing your station early may leave the on site event staff without communications. If you must leave, inform the net control station so they can get a replacement at your location. You may secure your station as soon as the net control station or event official grants permission. Once your station is secured, bring any materials (badges, vests, etc.) back to the communications coordinator or net control station.

AFTER THE EVENT

At the end of the event, there will be many loose ends to clear up. This is the best time to give suggestions and constructive criticism to the event communications coordinator. You may also have suggestions relative to the event itself, which can be passed on to the event organizers. If possible, write all suggestions down for inclusion in the event 'after action report'

Conclusion

No two special event operations are going to be the same. Amateur Radio is a hobby activity, but if we exercise professionalism we show the public that Amateur Radio is something special, which what it's all about.