Tips for Net Control

1. Determine if the event has to use a repeater or if simplex will suffice. It is good operating practice to use simplex rather than tying up a repeater although sometimes, usually due to geography, simplex may not be usable.

2. Provide a short on-air briefing at the start of the event if appropriate. Net Control needs to make an "all stations" announcement on the main frequency used for the event requesting that all stations stand-by until the end of the event (give an approximate time). Make appropriate and brief announcements of the nature of the event.

3. Politely ask stations not involved in the event to keep the frequency clear unless urgent. There is no priority under the radio regulations for non-emergency or 'event' traffic and we must respect other Amateurs' right to use a frequency.

4. Repeat the event announcement when the Net is started and every half-hour or so until the end at which time the frequency should be released for normal use.

5. Get or make a copy of the assignment or sign-in sheet showing the list of amateur radio operators who are working at the event, available for assignments.

6. If appropriate to the event, assign 'Tactical' call signs that reflect a geographical position or task. For example: 'Medical' or 'Burrard'. Tactical call signs help eliminate confusion and are easier to remember than individual callsigns.

7. If it is not on the assignment sheet, on a blank 8.5"x11" sheet of paper, make a list of all the posts that have to be covered. Typically, the post name becomes the tactical call sign. On this sheet, write the first name and call sign of each person assigned to a particular post. Make this the working base for assignments. As people are rotated, cross off those no longer at a post and write in the person currently assigned to it.

8. Find out if someone has been promised a particular post; assign those people first. Next, find out who has a preference as to where they are assigned. Ask for physical limitations (back problems, limited walking capability). Assign posts accordingly. Find out who has to leave early and the time they have to go.

9. Have a magnet or push-pin with position numbers or callsigns on a map of the event area. Place the pin on the map when the station is in service, rotate it upside down if they are busy or temporarily away from the post. Remove it when they go out of service.

10. Do not mention frequencies used to prevent malicious interference. Refer to frequencies by channel number or name.

11. Remind everyone that they are not to leave their post without first informing Net Control. This is especially imperative for the critical posts. If they have to take a break, they should first call Net Control and state the expected length of time they need to be away from the post. For any break longer than 5 minutes (except for shadows), a new person should be assigned to take over the post. For 'shadows', a new person must be assigned even for a 5 minute break. (In just a minute a shadow can get separated from the person being shadowed and communication to that event person is lost.)

12. Encourage the use of brief communications and 'Break Tags' to reduce needless chatter.

13. Have everyone do a radio check with Net Control BEFORE leaving the Net Control area. If applicable, make sure they have PL set properly and can easily switch to the secondary frequency if necessary. Make sure each person knows their tactical call sign.

14. Everyone should report to Net Control when they reach their post ("on station"). Net Control should request a radio signal report from each station to determine the lowest power setting that Net Control can use and still be heard at every post.

15. Once all posts have reported in, it's a good idea to do a roll call every half hour or so. If a post doesn't answer, try it two more times then move on. After roll call try the post again. If still no response, send someone to find the person at the post and have them check that they aren't off frequency and that the battery isn't dead. (In the past, hams have commented, "I was wondering why it was so quiet on the Net … I didn't hear anything for a long time and didn't realize it was a problem with my radio.) Roll call is also useful to ensure station ID is provided according to IC regulations.

16. It is extremely important that Net Control follow up on all requests for information. Net Control will not have all the answers, but should be able to get them, particularly from the event liaison. Post-it notes are one way to note down traffic that requires a reply. As the replies are given, the Post-it can be tossed or filed away as desired. Sometimes a formal log sheet is requested or required. The benefit to the log sheet is that it provides an orderly historical record of what's happened in the event so far. Whatever method you use, note the time the information was requested and the time the reply was given.

17. When rotating people as Net Control, be sure to let the next person know what's happening, and what replies are pending. It's important to have them use the Post rotation sheet so when you return or another person takes over, the post assignments are clearly indicated. Consider a situation board as a means of keeping important briefing info at hand.

18. Every post must be able to hear and contact Net Control. However, individual posts may not be able to hear one another. It's helpful for Net Control to repeat traffic that all posts should know about. For instance, Nancy's 'shadow' reports that Nancy is looking for Dan. Net Control can say something like "I copy that Nancy is looking for Dan; all posts should report Dan's location to Net Control."

19. Let posts talk directly to each other whenever possible. Relay only if one post can't hear the other. When a post needs to "go direct", they should contact Net Control requesting to go direct to the other post. "Go direct" is all that Net Control has to say. When the traffic is complete, the requesting station should contact Net Control to hand back the frequency. If this isn't done, Net Control should ask the initiating post if they are finished with their direct traffic.

20. Long messages (item lists, long transmissions between posts) should be put off to the secondary frequency so the primary frequency isn't tied up.

21. Allow some "drop" time so priority traffic can break in if necessary. If an exchange goes on for more than 30 seconds, take a breath between transmissions "just in case". Also, if Net Control needs a moment to think about something, don't keep the PTT button pushed. Do your thinking off the air.

22. It's okay to ask a station to "stand by" while you finish with some other communications or finish handling some situation at the Net Control station. Just make sure you're not putting off priority or emergency traffic.

23. Be sure to have a map of the entire event with key locations clearly marked. A lot of traffic comes in asking where such-and-such is.

24. Always be sure you can easily contact the Communications Team Leader. If the Team Leader has to leave the event temporarily, have a radio frequency or cell phone available to contact him even when off site. Make sure the Team Leader monitors the radio or has the cell phone turned on.

25. IC requires that hams give their call signs every 30 minutes and when a contact is finished. Since Net Control is transmitting frequently, be sure to give your call sign at least every 30 minutes. ("This is VE7VCT, Net Control for the Marathon event"). Shadow hams or those at a post may want to end every completed roll call with Net Control using something like "This is Nancy's Shadow, VE7XXX" because they really don't know if they'll be transmitting again within 30 minutes.

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