

Net Control Station Procedures

1. Introduction

To provide a basis for carrying out the mission of the Tippecanoe County, Indiana, Amateur Radio Emergency Service® (ARES®), guidelines must be in place to meet the communications requirements of Served Agencies. This document provides structured formats for use by Tippecanoe County ARES Net Control Stations (NCS) and Alternate Net Control Stations (ANCS), based on guidelines of the American Radio Relay League (ARRL), Incident Command System (ICS), and National Incident Management System (NIMS).

2. Responsibilities

The Assistant Emergency Coordinator for Operations and the Assistant Emergency Coordinator for Network Operations, jointly responsible for Net Management, are the authors and maintainers of this document.

Each designated NCS in Tippecanoe County ARES is responsible for thoroughly reviewing and following the procedures defined in this document. All members of Tippecanoe County ARES should be familiar with this document. It provides an understanding of basic net control station operations and defines Increased Readiness Conditions (Net Conditions).

Each Tippecanoe County ARES member should be prepared to serve in the capacity of NCS or ANCS, if needed. Typically, the roles will be filled by those assigned as designated NCS stations by the EC, Operations AEC, or Network Operations AEC, but situations may arise where other operators are needed to fulfill NCS responsibilities.

3. Related Publications

NET 1-2	Net Operations
NET 1-3	Net Frequencies
NET 1-4	Net Formats
OP PLAN 100	National Weather Service Support Plan (SKYWARN Operations Plan)

4. Definition of Terms

AEC	Assistant Emergency Coordinator
ANCS	Alternate Net Control Station
ARES	Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES® and Amateur Radio Emergency Service® are registered service marks of the American Radio Relay League.)
ARRL	American Radio Relay League
EC	Emergency Coordinator
ICS	Incident Command System
NCS	Net Control Station

NIMS	National Incident Management System
PIO	Public Information Officer
Served Agency	An agency with which Tippecanoe County ARES has established a support agreement through the implementation of a formal Memorandum of Understanding.
SIT REP(S)	Situation Report(s)

5. Guidelines

5.1 General Guidelines

When required to support emergency situations or during routine training in net operations, most Tippecanoe County ARES nets will function as directed nets using an Increased Readiness Condition (Net Condition) defined in Section 5.3, as appropriate to the situation. All training and severe weather nets are to be conducted using a suitable format from document NET 1-4, Net Formats. If one is not available that matches the situation exactly, use one close to what is needed and adjust the verbiage as required.

5.2 Net Operation

5.2.1 Appointment of Other Functions

One of the first duties of the NCS at the start of a net is to appoint an Alternate Net Control Station (ANCS). Should the NCS station become inoperable due to equipment problems, loss of power, or some other event, the ANCS needs to immediately step in and assume control of the net as soon as it's determined the NCS is not available.

Liaison stations are to be appointed as required by the Operations Plan under which the net is activated and/or as directed by Planning Committee actions to respond to the particular situation.

5.2.2 Maintain a Log

Maintain a log of all stations checking into the net. Record the time you assume net control, the Net Condition, frequencies used, the call sign of the NCS/ANCS, and any liaison stations.

Use form ICS 309 (Communications Log) to record the exchanges with each station, including the details of the communications, and basic "from" and "to" information. Record the time for each event. Use local time to preclude confusion if later correlation is required.

5.2.3 Take Breaks

The EC, Operations AEC, or Network Operations AEC will immediately begin to establish net control rotation for what may be long duration events. NCS operators get tired. When that happens, operations become less efficient and mistakes in judgment are more likely. When conditions are such that a break is needed, the NCS should turn over operation to the ANCS.

5.2.4 Situation Reporting

During the start of nets supporting major events and during the course of an event, it may be necessary to perform roll calls to determine the status of stations, to routinely test connectivity, or to collect other information. This type of reporting is referred to as Situation Reporting, or SIT REP, for short. SIT REP is performed by conducting a roll call, during which particular stations will respond, as directed by the NCS, with the information requested.

The NCS can use a SIT REP to request the status of any facet of an operation. Examples would be a report of all operators available at each site, the status of the installation of additional communications equipment, the occupancy of open shelters, etc. A sample format for a SIT REP sequence is provided in document NET 1-4, Net Formats.

5.2.5 Close the Net When Appropriate

As soon as the event is over, anticipate a directive from ARES leadership to begin closing the net. This action will generally be at the request of the Served Agency. If the Served Agency is apparently slow in releasing resources, inform ARES leadership. When releasing participants, log their release as part of the closing process.

5.2.6 Hints and Kinks

The following tips and guidelines are taken from various emergency communications training materials, particularly from the ARRL Emergency Communications courses.

- If it is a scheduled net, start on time.
- Use a script when/where possible. If you have time, make notes to yourself to help with the information in the script – before you start the net.
- Be friendly, yet in control – speak slowly and clearly with an even tone, not a monotone. Sound confident, even if you are not. Above all, don't worry. Just give it an honest try.
- Ask SPECIFIC questions, give SPECIFIC instructions! You can make it much harder on yourself with nebulous questions and instructions.
- Have pencil/paper ready and write down ALL calls. It helps to practice with writing down calls when you are not the NCS or ANCS.
- Read your owner's manual and understand how to use your radio and your microphone. The worst sounding NCS is one that cannot be heard or sounds like a train huffing and puffing in the microphone as they speak. From the ARRL Field Resources Manual: Articulate, don't slur. Speak close to your mike, but talk across it, not into it.
- When there is a double, try to get something unique from one or more of the stations. Then call for clarification from those stations only.

- Be sure to frequently identify the purpose of the net. (Let people know what they are checking into!)
- Ask for assistance if/when you need it. Delegate responsibilities. You cannot do it all.
- If you are running an emergency Operations Net, remind stations where the Logistics Net is. Someone checking in just to say they are listening only slows the Operations Net.
- Don't be afraid to say "stand by" if you get flustered. Pause, take a deep breath, and go back at it. If you make a mistake, remember this is not brain surgery. Do your best to CALMLY recover. Nothing more will ever be asked of anyone.
- DON'T THINK ON THE AIR! If you need a moment to consider what is needed next, say something like "stand by" and un-key your microphone.
- Keep transmissions as short as possible. Resist the tendency to rag chew or ramble.
- Transmit only facts! If there is need to make an educated guess or speculate, make sure it is VERY clear that it is speculation. First choice is to not speculate at all.
- If a report comes from an unidentified source, it should not be treated as credible, until you are able to obtain proper verification. If a station refuses to identify, ignore the station unless you have reason to believe it is a life-threatening situation.
- If someone is clearly jamming, or deliberately causing interference, **do not** acknowledge their presence on the air. Continue net operation as normal, even if that means asking stations to repeat, make use of relays, or temporarily utilize alternate frequencies. Under **no** circumstances should you direct any communications to the jammer, or discuss the effectiveness of the interference, or other details about the incident on the air. As Net Control, you should keep others from doing the same. **Absolute silence about the issue**, and **zero recognition on the air**, is the recommended way to handle this type of situation. It may not immediately resolve the problem, but following these guidelines will certainly not encourage the interfering station to continue.
- Avoid becoming the source for general information about the event. If it is an emergency, refer event status questions to the served agency Public Information Officer (PIO).
- Use phonetics only when needed. Do not over-use them. When necessary, use standard ITU phonetics, and **only** standard ITU phonetics. There is no such thing as "common spelling". Send all numbers individually, e.g., 334 is three three four, not three hundred thirty four.
- For voice nets, use plain English. Avoid "Q" signals, 10-codes, and other radio "slang".
- If the net has been quiet for more than a few minutes (Net Conditions 1, 2 and 3 only), check on operator status or give the periodic announcement. This keeps the net running smoothly and insures you know about equipment failures as soon as possible.

5.3 Increased Readiness Conditions (Net Conditions)

The Increased Readiness Conditions described below are protocols used in the operations of Tippecanoe County ARES. Most emergencies follow some recognizable build-up period during which actions can be taken to achieve a state of maximum readiness. These readiness conditions are used as a method of increasing the alert posture of ARES members. ARES nets will follow these designations to maintain a level of net discipline appropriate to the situation, and provide more effective communications. The descriptions below are for guidance purposes. Certain situations may require the handling of various net conditions in a manner that does not exactly fit these descriptions. Such decisions are the responsibility of the Net Control Station (NCS).

5.3.1 **Net Condition 4:** (Situational Awareness / Increased Readiness / OP PLAN Review)

Condition 4 is the lowest level of Increased Readiness. It indicates an increased potential threat above normal conditions, but poses no immediate threat to life or property in the area. It exists to provide a presence on the frequencies and serve as a structure for potential elevation into higher levels. It also serves as a means of notifying ARES personnel of the Increased Readiness Condition, allowing them an opportunity to review the appropriate operations plan and written procedures, check the status of their equipment, and otherwise prepare ahead of time for the potential threat. The net is conducted in an informal, non-directed fashion and is open to all reports concerning weather in the area, reports of non-emergency situations, or the status of responding stations. In weather related situations, Net Condition 4 is the equivalent of a National Weather Service “watch” condition. Situation Reports (SIT REPS) may freely be conducted during this condition.

5.3.2 **Net Condition 3:** (Escalated Vigilance / Pre-Event Preparation / Resource Reporting & Positioning)

Condition 3 identifies the situation where hazards may exist that present a greater potential or more immediate threat than Condition 4 to life and/or property. Open reporting, except in the case of emergencies or the existence of dangerous conditions, is ceased. The NCS will conduct a net in a directed, tactical format with all communications being managed under NCS guidance. The NCS is in control of the deployment and management of all communications resources that are to be used. In weather related situations, Net Condition 3 is the equivalent of a National Weather Service “watch” condition, but with an increased threat probability. Weather situations that have not been declared an official warning by the National Weather Service, but still pose a potential, imminent threat, are typical criteria for Net Condition 3 activation. A warning issued for severe weather in nearby jurisdictions, which has a high probability of impacting our county, is another example of validation to activate at Net Condition 3. SIT REPS may be taken during this condition, but without returning the net to background operation.

5.3.3 **Net Condition 2:** (Event Occurrence / Response Operations / Tactical Emergency Comms)

Condition 2 activation is warranted when a very hazardous situation exists that poses an immediate threat to life and/or property. The net is managed in a highly restricted format with reports being taken under NCS direction only, unless a true emergency exists. In weather related situations, Condition 2 is the equivalent of a National Weather Service “warning” condition. No unrequested communications should take place except by the permission of the NCS. The only exception to this would be the report of a situation where a threat to human life or major injury is eminent. If such a direct emergency communication is encountered, all other net operations will cease. The net will resume under Condition 2 after the life-threatening event is under control. The actions taken by the NCS in Condition 2 can, in a very real way, impact the safety of those involved in the situation and impact the responsiveness of emergency services to those in need. This is why net communication is limited to only responses and requests from the NCS, except in situations described above. The NCS cannot allow random and unrequested communications to take place during this condition. SIT REPS may be taken during this condition, but without returning the net to background operation.

5.3.4 **Net Condition 1:** (Disaster Operations / Emergency or Priority Only / Alternate Nets)

Net Condition 1 exists at a time when a major disaster **has just** occurred. The most extreme form of net discipline is required at this time. Only the highest priority communications will occur. Information being handled will fit either emergency or priority classifications. The net in this condition will not handle welfare or routine messages. Such messages will be delayed in their processing, or handled by another net established for that express purpose. If the situation allows, SIT REPS may be requested to gather specific information, as needed.

5.4 Post-Event Reporting

After completing an event, each NCS and ANCS should fill out the net report form on the Tippecanoe County ARES web site, at www.w9tca.com/net-report. Alternatively, each NCS and ANCS may email their reports to net-report@w9tca.com listing the calls of all net participants, the stations acting as NCS and ANCS, and the opening and closing times of the net. In addition, any details, significant events, and problems encountered should be included.

If requested, provide a copy of all logs maintained during the course of the event. If any audio recordings of the net operations were made, they should also be provided.

6. Release Information

The date of publication for this document is 05 DEC 2011.

Change log:

05 DEC 2011	Minor updates and clarifications throughout the document.
03 JAN 2010	Minor clarifications throughout the document. Sentence spacing increased to improve readability. Reference to a related publication removed.
11 NOV 2008	The contents of the Appendix were moved to a newly created document, NET 1-4, Net Formats. This allows the net formats to be updated periodically without the need for a revision to the entire Net Management document.
12 OCT 2008	Minor changes to the Weekly Training Net Format and SKYWARN Net formats.
01 SEP 2008	Minor changes to section 2, "Responsibilities". Re-titled section 5.3 to "Increased Readiness Conditions (Net Conditions)" to more accurately reflect the content and maintain continuity with other ARES documents and guidelines. Changed portions of all subsections in section 5.3 to further define Net Conditions, and how they relate to the Increased Readiness Condition protocols. Removed blank page for Served Agency Support Net Format from the Appendix. (Any specific net format required to support served agencies will be added to this document in the future, as needed.)
31 AUG 2008	Changed portions of sections 5.3.2 (Net Condition 3) and 5.3.3 (Net Condition 2) to clarify wording that describes the operational concepts. Minor changes to all of the SKYWARN Net scripts in the Appendix.
27 AUG 2008	Changed various portions of the Appendix document, "Weekly Training Net Format". Changed portions of the Appendix document, "SKYWARN Net, Net Condition 4" script, to remove references to SKYWARN, per NWS protocol.