

Eastern New York Section
Simulated Emergency Test of October 5, 2013

Preliminary After Action Report

The Eastern New York Section conducted a section-wide Simulated Emergency Test (SET) on the first Saturday of October in conjunction with the American Radio Relay League (ARRL) annual nationwide program.

A planning group received an email on August 21, 2013 from Section Emergency Coordinator David Galletly KM2O after informally discussing the date with several ARES leaders.

As part of the ARRL's annual Simulated Emergency Test (SET), held each October nationwide, individual groups and sections are asked to participate. This year, we would like to do a drill involving the entire Eastern New York Section. It has been decided that the first Saturday of October (Oct. 5) will be the date for the ENY SET.

While each individual county is free to participate or not, we would like to do a test of county-district-section communications on that date. We would also like to obtain the cooperation of several served agencies to activate in locations that might be used in a widespread emergency. This would entail possible activation of stations such as EOC's, Weather Service (Albany) and Red Cross (Northeastern NY) locations. The duration of the exercise would be approximately 2 to 4 hours including setup and deactivation with on air activity planned between 10 am and noon.

The scenario is not yet in place, however it should be based on a response that would involve a wide area and multiple organizations. My present thinking involves a large release of some type that would include the need for dispersal reporting and possible evacuations. Counties might wish to use the opportunity to run a drill based on the overall scenario.

The establishment of a section coordination net, along with district and county nets as appropriate is planned.

Again, this would be a communications drill only. It would be aimed primarily at the ability to set up a network of support stations in a short time to handle logistical traffic between sites using various modes and methods. It would not require the participation of agency personnel, unless they wished to become involved. The section and district level participation would involve the use of fixed stations only. Counties could add a mobile component at their sole discretion but this adds a level of complexity and possible liability that would have to be under local responsibility. A county level tabletop could also be done based on the scenario.

Please feel free to comment among the recipients of this email with comments, ideas and critiques.

KM2O first announced the setting of the date for the SET included in a message to the eny_ares Yahoo group on August 12, 2013:

A section wide Simulated Emergency Test (SET) will be held on Saturday, October 5. It is meant to include served agency, county, district and section level components. We would like to test a "top down-bottom up" response in the section. Likely duration 2-3 hours. Details will be upcoming.

Discussions on the parameters of the SET continued throughout August with various ARES leaders in the section. The overall plan was to test communications within each section county with the added levels of coordination between counties in each district and an overall district coordination net. The initial thought of an overall section-wide scenario was rejected due to the complexity. ARRL asks participants to submit a score sheet for an annual compilation of national exercises. Northern District DEC John Fritze K2QY and Assistant DEC Gerald Murray WA2IWW came up with a plan for a scoring system that used a slightly different point system that would highlight areas for concentration and levels of cooperation with local authorities and served agencies. Contact was made with the Northeast New York Region of the American Red Cross with whom the section has an executed Cooperative Agreement, the National Weather Service Albany Forecast Office and the State RACES Radio Officer about cooperation in the exercise.

On September 11, SEC KM2O sent the following to ARES leaders with a request to forward as appropriate:

TO: All ENY ARES members

Please excuse the length of this important email. Please forward as appropriate.

As many of you are aware, we have scheduled our section's participation in the ARRL's annual Simulated Emergency Test on Saturday, October 5. After some discussion, we have abandoned the setting of a specific scenario and instead decided to create an exercise that sets a baseline for each county organization by setting a score for that group. The score will allow each group to compare themselves to other county organizations in the section but more importantly, it sets a standard to measure its own performance year to year. Counties are completely free to make an underlying set of assumptions for their participation but overall this is a test of our communications abilities from top to bottom.

While the ARRL has set out scoring for SETs on an annual basis, and we encourage groups to submit scores to the ARRL, our section rules will call for specific coordinated actions and will score some things differently in order to look at setting training agendas for the groups, districts and the section as a whole. Another goal is to boost participation throughout the section.

The SET ground rules follow in plain text and will also be posted at the eny_ares yahoo group as well as the ARES web page at hudson.arrl.org/eny.

EASTERN NEW YORK SECTION SET 2013

The premise for this exercise is to accumulate as many points for each County as possible by activating as many stations as possible from as many locations (including any served agencies) as possible. Points are accumulated for each active station and up to

10 pieces of traffic (either formal or tactical) sent either at the local net level or passed to other local, district, section level nets or served agencies. A summary of point scoring is below. This system may vary from the ARRL SET scoring to emphasize section objectives.

RULES

IMPORTANT NOTE: The words "DRILL MESSAGE" shall appear at the beginning of all messages, formal or tactical. "END DRILL MESSAGE" shall appear at the end of each piece of formal traffic.

The Section net for this drill will be held on the N2ACF repeater system. See rra.net for local frequencies. Stations not participating should refrain from the use of this system during the exercise. District nets are as arranged by the DEC.

Hours of operation: 9 AM through 12 NOON, October 5th 2013.

At 9 AM, each county shall activate a county net on its designated repeater and/or designated simplex frequency. At the minimum there shall be a NCS and a liaison station (for moving messages to other nets). All active stations in each county will check into their preferred net and give signal report, a total of their station's individual points and any message they wish to pass. If the net has moved to its designated simplex frequency, at each 1/2 hour increment either the NCS or a liaison shall check the primary repeater frequency for any incoming or outgoing traffic. At 11am, all local nets shall send a liaison to the District net to check in with a signal report and the total of points they have achieved (this may account for 1 piece of traffic). At 11:30 AM the District NCS will check into the Section net with a formal piece of traffic for the SEC giving total points for the district. NOTE: Counties without a defined district net may check in directly to the Section Net on the N2ACF system at 11:30 AM.

Exercise ends at 12 NOON. Stations may secure earlier if no further service is expected. Typically this will be the individual mobile, home or portable stations. Served agencies should stay active until the exercise ends and may wish to monitor the Section Net for further information.

Each county EC or their designate is responsible to see that this event runs smoothly and points are collected as accurately as possible. While there will be a tendency for competition between counties, ideally each county is in competition with itself. This score will become a base number for each county to improve itself over time by incorporating better contact with served agencies, learning new skills, and procedures.

AFTER ACTION REPORT

Within 10days of the SET, the EC/RO or designate should submit a written report/summary of:

- 1) the breakdown of the point count
- 2) comments of what went wrong or didn't work as anticipated
- 3) comments on what worked correctly
- 4) ideas for improvement

These reports should be submitted (email preferred) to the DEC and SEC and should be shared with members of the group as a discussion topic.

Please also complete and send the ARRL 2013 EC SET report and send to the ARRL. Deadline is February 3, 2014.

SET 2013 POINT SYSTEM FOR EACH COUNTY

- 15 points.....Served Agency HQ Locations (County EOCs, Red Cross and National Weather Service offices, etc.)
- 10 points....."Shelters" including fire stations, churches, hospitals or schools (operator has made contact with agency and ideally stationed inside the premises)
- 10 points.....using portable gear at remote location (includes dedicated "Go Box" and portable VHF/UHF antenna-not mobile)
- 10 points per op...using NBEMS, Winlink, D-Star or other digital means (both Receive and transmitting stations receive credit)
- 10 points.....for press release submitted
- 5 points per op...using non-commercial power (includes generator, battery, solar, etc.)
- 5 points per op...mobile operators
- 5 points....."shelters"(see above) in parking lot only
- 3 points per op...operator using APRS
- 2 points.....operator at home
- 1 point.....for EACH piece of formal traffic sent (10 points maximum)

The SET plans generated interest in several counties, starting several conversations. It was the topic of emails between participants and officials throughout the weeks leading up to October 5. Red Cross participation was firmed up with chapter houses in Albany, Glens Falls and Poughkeepsie to open stations for the exercise. The National Weather Service agreed to open its SKYWARN station to participate. The State RACESC Deputy Radio Officer agreed to join the exercise as well. Unfortunately, a few days prior to the exercise, the National Weather Service was forced to pull out of participation due to the federal government shutdown on October 1.

On Saturday, October 5 at 9 AM the exercise began. John Farina W2QCY started an informal section coordination net on the N2ACF repeater system. The system links several hardened UHF repeaters covering from New York City and Long Island to the Capital Region and is a designated district level emergency resource. This net was provided for any inter-county, inter-district or served agency coordination that might be required. Shortly after 11 AM, W2QCY elevated the net to formal status to pass traffic related to the SET across the section. KM2O was on frequency to receive results messages. 13 stations checked into the net.

The section net traffic reported raw score results from the following ten counties:

- Albany: 407
- Dutchess: 77
- Greene: 272
- Orange: 446
- Rensselaer: 157
- Saratoga: 130
- Schenectady: 307
- Warren/Washington: 297
- Ulster: 100

A “Hot Wash” was held at a previously scheduled section ARES meeting the next day held in Delmar NY. The SEC, Northern District DEC, EC’s from Rensselaer, Saratoga, Schenectady and Ulster counties as well as other ARES members participated. Comments were emailed from the Orange county EC as well.

The sense of the group was that overall, the SET was successful, a useful as well as fun activity for those who took part. Comments from the meeting covered the following areas:

- Coordination with the Red Cross was an area that needed to be worked on by leaders. Some confusion over personnel assignments arose due to lack of communication. Considered a relatively minor issue by the group, some operators were shifted from other assignments without notification.
- A major topic that needs to be addressed by many groups is training of members. Examples included:
 - Programming of radios
 - Net procedures
 - Proper formal traffic handling
- Rensselaer County, employing Near Vertical Incidence Skywave (NVIS) propagation on 80 meter HF frequencies for countywide communications had a very successful outcome.
- Counties using Narrow Band Emergency Messaging System (NBEMS) software for digital transmission of formal traffic also experienced a high level of success.
- The use of district-wide nets met with various outcomes. While generally successful, the use of the 145.19 repeater in the Northern District was questioned going forward. Use of the 147.375 repeater for district purposes was discussed. There were no other district nets convened. Discussion needs to be held in the Central and Southern Districts on this issue.
- There was some confusion regarding the actual application of the point system in the drill. The system is looked upon favorably but may need some ‘tweaking’ going forward.
- A question was raised about the amount of advance preparation time needed for the exercise. Consensus was the amount of warning was sufficient.
- Orange County noted that in future to “Make sure the Winlink whitelist contains APRS domains or you won’t receive APRS messages at your Winlink accounts. 2 radio operators at the ESC are not enough to run 2 quad band radios, the HF rig, and a Winlink node.”

- For ARES in Orange County, HF simplex voice comms within a 20 mile radius were much better using 10 meter FM than 80 meter SSB. Not sure if this was due to MUF, terrain, time of day, all the above, none of the above.

Since this exercise occurred less than a week ago, the full breakdowns of score requested from EC's has not yet been received. An analysis of those scores as well as the above comments should form the basis of recruitment, meeting programming, training and relationship building for each group in the year ahead. The overall goal for next year's SET should be for each county to increase its score. This can be done through increased participation, adoption of digital modes, increasing levels of cooperation with served agencies and further familiarization with message handling.

Groups should aim to participate in next year's section SET. Due to the religious holiday of Yom Kippur falling on the first weekend of October, it is suggested that the 2014 SET be held on the second weekend on Saturday, October 11.

David Galletly KM2O
Section Emergency Coordinator
Eastern New York Section

October 10, 2013