+ HOW TO WRITE TEST MESSAGES
(An EM advanced studies training module. - Updated)
Emcomm traffic is the transfer of information or messages that are of a critical or emergent nature by amateur radio operators when normal systems fail or are overloaded. These are third-party messages that may be critical to the saving of lives, prevent, mitigate and relieve injury or suffering, and aid with the protection of property. This radio communication service is separate from, and does not depend upon, any "infrastructure" (power grid, landlines, etc.). It is provided free of charge to private and public agencies as well as the general public.

TEST MESSAGES may be actual (e.g. - a greeting or some other real message to a relative, friend or official)...or they may be simulated.

In order to fulfill our mission, serious emcomm radio operators are constantly planning, training, and practicing tactical and message traffic RADIO communications. This is accomplished in meetings, classrooms, and by using "home study" methods. These skills are then practiced and tested on regular local and regional nets and during special drills and exercises.

Before we discuss "How to write TEST (simulated) messages", let us first review some basics:

1. As a general rule, ACRONYMS and ABBREVIATIONS should not be used in RADIOGRAM texts. (These "words" may not be familiar to recipients, especially members of the general public.)

2. All message texts should be composed is such a manner that they CANNOT BE INTERPRETED IN ANY OTHER WAY except what is intended.
(This is what separates communicators from mere radio operators!)

3. Always keep in mind that it is NOT necessary for traffic handlers along the route understand a message's content. If you mail a postcard to a friend, you do not expect a postal worker to read, understand, or even care about your message. If a postal worker happens to read it, I doubt very strongly that they will contact you and say, "This doesn't make sense. Is that really what you wanted to say?" All that matters is that the addressee receives and understands the message. Sadly, too many times, I have heard traffic handlers discuss and comment about messages that they are relaying. Good traffic handlers receive, forward and deliver messages word-for-word and letter-for-letter. (This also is what separates communicators from mere radio operators!)

4. Some message originators prefer to spell out numerals. This may reduce errors, especially in Morse traffic. A figure in CW may be copied incorrectly, but EIGHT spelled out is hard to miss. However, no matter how a message was originated...it is unforgivable for an operator to change one "jot or tittle"

along the way!

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF "COMPOSING (SIMULATED) TEST MESSAGES":

It is often harder to compose a TEST MESSAGE than an actual message. Here are a few TIPS:

1. A PRACTICE MESSAGE is an actual RADIOGRAM. It is usually of a non-essential nature and was originated solely to provide experience.

2. TEST MESSAGES are fictitious (simulated) and are used as training tools in classroom practice sessions, on-the-air training sessions, test exercises and drills.

3. ALL messages (whether actual or simulated) should be forwarded and delivered. NO MATTER HOW LONG IT TAKES! (Unless, of course, the handling instructions say otherwise.) If not, a SERVICE MESSAGE* should be originated with an explanation or request for more information.

4. With rare exception, incomplete RADIOGRAMS (no address, etc.) should not be accepted by an originating station.

5. ALL message traffic (TEST or otherwise) must be originated, relayed and delivered using proper operating procedures. Don't try to change or improve a method that has been time-tested and proven to work well!

6. BREVITY is always appropriate. It is one of the skills needed (but often lacking) in message traffic.

7. Test message TEXTS may be "serious sounding" such as:

TEST MESSAGE X WATER RISING
SEND BOATS TO NORTH REEF
ACCESS AT CROWN POINT

Or, they can be "whimsical and fun" such as:

TEST MESSAGE X SUSHI IS
CALLED BAIT IN BAJA CALIFORNIA

Or, they may be "instructional" such as:

TEST MESSAGE X ON VOICE
SPELL HOMONYMS X EXAMPLES TO
TOO AND TWO X FOR
AND FOUR X ALWAYS USE

ITU PHONETICS

8. TEST (or practice) messages should be simple. But they may include some "tricky words" to test the skill of the handlers.
In reality, there is no such thing as a "tricky word" in a message, since radio operators only send/forward/receive what is written in front of them.
However, the human mind often plays tricks. Recently the first name of an addressee in a message was "Jo", but the receiving operator copied it as "Joe".
BEWARE, Our minds have a tendency to "fill in" what we expect is coming. Train your brain to copy everything exactly as it is heard.
If you are not sure, ask for a "fill". Do NOT ever send "received" (R NR39 in Morse, or in voice ROGER NUMBER THUH-REE NIN-ER), until you are sure you have it 100% correct! And never sign off or start sending another message until the receiving station has sent (to you) R NR _____ (CW) or said: ROGER NUMBER ____ .

9. ALL TEST messages, in all modes, MUST have TEST R (or TEST P etc.) in the preamble and TEST MESSAGE X as the first three words in the TEXT. These three "words" are always counted in the "check". This means that your message may contain a maximum of 22 additional words.)

10. ALL messages, in any mode, use the standardized (universal) message format. Every time...all the time. Why practice something the wrong way?

***SERVICE MESSAGE (ref. TRAFFIC HANDLING, April 2006 EMCOMM MONTHLY at www.emcomm.org/em/april2006.htm