

Tips for Net Control

These are things that have done in the past and learned while operating as Net Control at various events and found to be quite helpful. Hope you do, too! Remember NET CONTROL is in charge of the net and calls the shots, right or wrong and should have an assistant to cover the logging requirements. A back up net control, especially on HF Nets is a must due to propagation. The after-action report or discussion after the event, can clear up any short comings or improvements that should be made.

1. 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.
2. Get or make a copy of the sign-in sheet showing the list of amateur radio operators who are working at the event, available for assignments.
3. Assign your various sites to operators as site operations may require, based on their mission. Next, find out who has a preference as to where they are assigned. Ask for physical limitations (back problems, limited walking capability). Make assignments accordingly. Find out who has to leave early and the time they have to go. Net Control should know ahead of time the teams schedule, reliefs, and new sites or check points that are activated after the net has started.
4. Remind everyone that they are not to leave their assignment without first informing Net Control. This is especially imperative for the critical sites. 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 position. For any break longer than 5 minutes (except for shadows), a new person should be assigned to take over the site. 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.)
5. Have everyone do a radio check with Net Control BEFORE leaving the Net Control area. Make sure they have PL set properly on their hand helds and can easily switch to the secondary frequency if necessary. Make sure each person knows their tactical call sign if being used
6. Everyone should report to Net Control when they reach their position ("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 site. This could save on battery usage.
7. 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 operation

(give an approximate time). This should be done when the Net is started and every hour or so until the end at which time the frequency should be released for normal use.

8. Once all sites have reported in, it's a good idea to do a roll call every hour or so. If a site or check point 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.)
9. It is extremely important that Net Control follow up on all requests for information. Net Control will not have most of the answers, but should be able to get them, particularly from the Comm Boss (Communications Coordinator). Post-it notes are a good 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. During emergency operations formal log sheet is requested or required. The ICS 211 & 214 are quite handy. 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. Also log in all messages sent and received. It's a good idea to use a message #sheet to account for all messages, so you know if you need an answer, did you get it?
10. 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 site log so when you return or another person takes over, the events that occurred are available to review and allow for good continuity.
11. Every site or check point must be able to hear and contact Net Control. However, individual sites/check points 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 sites/check points should report Dan's location to Net Control." Also all stations on the net should copy written traffic, so if someone needs a relay and cannot hear the sending station completely you can relay.
12. Let sites go directly to each other whenever possible for direct traffic to that site from another site. Relay only if one site/checkpoint can't hear the other. When a site needs to "go direct", they should contact Net Control, requesting to go direct to the other site/checkpoint. "Contact your station" 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 site/checkpoint if they are finished with their direct traffic.

13. Long messages (item lists, long transmissions between posts) should be put off to the secondary frequency so the primary frequency isn't tied up.
14. 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.
15. Its 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.
16. Be sure to have a map and/or status board of the entire event with key locations clearly marked. A lot of traffic comes in asking where such-and-such is.
17. Always be sure you can easily contact the Comm Boss. If the Comm Boss has to leave the event temporarily, have a radio frequency or cell phone available to contact him even when off site. Make sure the Comm Boss monitors the radio or has the cell phone turned on.
18. Tactical Calls Signs can be used; however, the FCC requires that hams give their call signs every 10 minutes and when a contact is finished. Since Net Control is transmitting frequently, be sure to give your call sign every 10 minutes. ("This is KL7JFU, Net Control for the Jr. Iditarod event"). Shadow hams or those at a post may want to end every completed communication with Net Control using something like "This is Nancy's Shadow, KL2ED" because they really don't know if they'll be transmitting again within 10 minutes. Another method is for Net Control to call for all stations to ID every 10 minutes when Net Control calls the net.