

ICS-213

One of basic tenets of ICS is standardization. Standardization in ICS is in the basic structure, the titles and positions used, and the forms that are used. The most important form for us as communicators is ICS-213 -- the General Message Form. Some of us in the audience are familiar with the ARRL Radiogram, used in the National Traffic System or NTS. Why should we learn this new form when we already have a tried-and-true form? There are two main reasons. The first is that our served agencies are required to use ICS including ICS-213 and they are not familiar with the Radiogram form. The second reason is that these forms were designed for two different reasons. The Radiogram was designed to support NTS operations and ICS-213 was designed for the needs of Incident Command. ICS and NTS were also designed for different purposes. NTS was designed to pass traffic from one coast of the United States to the other within 24 hours. ICS was designed to manage an incident in a safe, effective, and cost effective manner.

Now, to the actual ICS-213 form. Those of you familiar with the Radiogram will be able to understand ICS-213 quickly. If you are not familiar with NTS, then ICS-213 is a very straightforward form to understand. The form can be separated into five sections. The first section is the Header. The Header contains the information necessary to route the message from the originator to the addressee. The Header has three lines. The first line is the "To" line. This line contains the proper name and the ICS position of the person who the message is addressed to. Proper names and ICS positions are always used in ICS-213. The second line is the "From" line. This line contains the originator of the message. The third line in the Header is the "Subject" line. This is the subject of the message such as "Immediate Evacuation of La Porte Necessary". The "Subject" line also contains the date and time the message was originated. Times and Dates should be in local time. The next section is the Message. This contains the Message Text. This text should be in plain language in accordance with ICS. The next section is the Signature and Position.. This contains the Signature of the person originating the message. A signature is necessary since all ICS-213's filed become part of the official record of the incident. A signature is also necessary since a legal request, which an ICS-213 may contain, requires a signature of a responsible official. The next section is the Reply Block. This contains the reply from the person who was the addressee back to the originator. The final section is the Reply Signature Block. This contains the time and date, again in local time, and the signature and ICS position of the person replying to the message. The signature is again required due to the possible legal aspects of the message.

Although the ICS-213 differs from the ARRL Radiogram, the same techniques used to pass NTS traffic should also be used for ICS traffic. Here is a recap on basic techniques:

If on a voice net:

Please write legibly!

Take pauses and stop transmitting every five or ten words. This allows the receiving station to either request fills for words missed or to tell you to slow down.

If on a voice net, remember to speak at about the same speed you can write.

If you are receiving the message, if you missed a word or words, request a repeat. Use "All

After", "All Before", "Word Before", and "Word After".

Use ITU Phonetics. "Cute" phonetics have no place in an emergency net. For instance "Keep All Five Children Very Happy" is fun in an informal QSO, but in an actual response, the proper phonetics are "Kilo Alfa Five Charlie Victor Hotel".

Spell out any words that have more than one spelling (homonyms). Remember there, their, they're. Use "I spell" in front of that word.

If it is a group of letters, numbers or both, indicate that before reading that group. Use "Letter Group", "Number Group", or "Mixed Group". For instance "KHGX" would be read "Letter Group Kilo Hotel Golf X-Ray", "12345" would be read "Number Group One Two Three Four Five", and "WX5HGX" would be read "Mixed Group Whiskey X-Ray Five Hotel Golf X-Ray".

Unlike NTS, use punctuation as in normal sentences such as period and comma. The question mark is still denoted by "Query".

E-Mail addresses are sent using "At Sign" to denote the at sign and "Dot" to indicate the dots in the address. For instance, example@example.net becomes "Example At Sign Example Dot Net". When in doubt, spell it out.

Even though ICS-213 does not have space to record who you received the message from an who you sent the message to, write this information down on the margin of the form since this form becomes an official record of the incident.

If using Winlink:

Please refrain from sending large files such as Microsoft Word or Excel files. Some agencies have developed software to automatically write an ICS-213 electronically. This speeds up the origination process, but a large file slows down passing the message on our circuits.

Please listen before transmitting. This is critically important on all circuits since you may inadvertently interfere with another emergency communication. It is even more important on HF since there is at least one group dedicated to having Winlink banned from amateur use and in fact has set up a website dedicated to placing all interference complaints with regards to Winlink "in an actionable format to the FCC". If Winlink is effectively banned from amateur use, we will have a serious problem since this group has no viable alternative to Winlink.

For all methods of passage:

Please maintain records of all the messages you handled. If you received a hand written copy, denote all the information on who you received the message from if you received it by radio and who you sent the message to if via radio. Please record the time, date, and frequency. If it is passed via Winlink, then Winlink maintains electronic copies of the messages. I would create a folder inside Airmail named after the incident and have two subfolders that contain the messages sent and the messages received. If a served agency requests these messages, then it is easy to print them out or export them in a text file.

Do not translate an ICS-213 message to the Radiogram format. Handle the message as

received. Remember that served agencies under the ICS umbrella require ICS-213. I have heard the opinion that amateur radio operators should use the Radiogram for all formal messages, but translating from ICS-213 to Radiogram and back again costs time. Time is very important in an emergency response. Remember, NTS was designed to send a message across the country in 24 hours. That's forever in terms of an emergency response. NTS will be used for Disaster Welfare Inquires (DWI's) from the American Red Cross so the Emergency Communicator should also be familiar with the NTS's practices and procedures.

I would like to thank ics213.com and the New York City Amateur Radio Emergency Communications Service for providing materials helpful during my research into ICS-213.

73 de kb5pgy