

NET-119
LOGGING AND RECORD KEEPING
Modified from a Waller County ARES training article.

What if you are the Net Control Station in charge of the net? We need to have a log for this just like you would keep a log of contacts on your home station, such as for contesting, etc.

An accurate record of formal messages handled is very important. Lost or misdirected messages can be tracked down later on, and a critique of the operation afterward can be more accurate. Your logs should include enough detail to be meaningful later on, especially the date and an accurate time. The time on your messages would be logged as the local date, time combination. Then there should be no confusion when deciphering them later for any reason. With some agencies, your log becomes a legal document and may be needed at some later time should an investigation occur. In this case, logs should be completed and turned in to the appropriate person for safekeeping and review.

What to Log:

Log all incoming and outgoing messages. Record the name of the sender, addressee, the station that passed the message to you, the station to whom the message was sent, the message number, and the times in and out. Keep the written copy of each message in numerical order for future reference.

Also, log which operators are on duty for any given period, and record any significant events at your station. These might include changes in conditions, power failures, meals, new arrivals and departures, equipment failures, and so on.

In addition to the log, copies of all messages should be kept and catalogued for easy retrieval if needed later for clarification or message tracking. Many operators make notes about when the message was received and sent, and to and from whom, directly on the message form itself. This helps speed up tracking later on. Never rely on your memory.

What about informal messages, should they be logged? This is usually up to the stations involved, and depends on the circumstances. Even informal messages can contain important details that may be need to be recalled later. Emergency or Priority messages of any kind should always be logged. Many net control operators like to log every message or exchange, no matter how inconsequential. Others like to log only those with potentially important details.

Log Formats:

At a station with little traffic, all information can be included in one chronological log. However, if a large number of messages are being handled and you have a second person to handle logging, separate logs can make it faster and easier to locate information if it is needed later. You might keep one log for incoming messages, one for outgoing messages, and a third for station activities. The NCS will also need to keep a log of which operators are assigned to each station, and the times they go on and off duty.

I have found some log forms on the North West Harris County ARES web site that might be useful for us. We may want to make a revision or two if we see a need but they will be a good

starting point for our files. There are several log formats available. One log format may fit one activity better than another.

They list a Volunteer List, which would list call sign, name, phone#, location, and a check list of frequencies the volunteer has the capabilities of at that time. These would be used for reference of who you have available when the need arises for someone either near a specific location, or with some specific equipment that might be needed.

They also list a Station Status List, which would list the tactical call sign, the FCC-call sign, and assigned location. When a person is called from the Volunteer List, they would be added to this list to easily reference the tactical call and where the volunteer was assigned to.

The third list they have is an Operations Log. This would be your general logging sheets for messages passed, the time received and time sent, and the message number. I would suspect in a busy net you might want to note the information on the message itself (as mentioned above) and then put onto this log as time permits.

Who should log:

At the net level, logging can be handled in several ways. If activity is low, the net control operator can handle logging. In a busy net, a second person can keep the log as the net's "secretary" and act as a "second set of ears" for the NCS. The logger can be at the NCS, or they might be listening from a different location.

If an "alternate NCS" station has been appointed, they should keep a duplicate log. If they need to "take over" the net at any point, all the information will be at hand, preserving the continuity of the net. We practice this on our nets, with our "backup net control operator".

In a fast moving tactical net, keeping a log while on the move may be impossible. In this case, the net control station may decide to keep one log detailing the various informal messages passed on the network.

Logging is a good position for a trainee with limited experience, or an unlicensed volunteer. Two experienced and licensed operators can also alternate between on-air and logging duties to help combat fatigue.

Writing Techniques For Message Copying and Logging

Your logs should be clear and legible to be of any use. Print in neat block letters on lined paper or a pre-printed log form. A firm writing surface will help. Keep both pens and pencils on hand since each works better under different conditions. Some operators prefer special "space" pens that will write on wet surfaces at any angle. You should also have a pencil sharpener or knife in your "ready kit." Logs should be kept in spiral bound notebooks to prevent pages from becoming lost. In the case of pre-printed log sheets, a three-ring binder works well. If more than one log is kept, each should be in its own notebook to prevent confusion and accidental entries.

In fast-moving situations, it can be difficult or impossible to keep a log of any kind. If a message, exchange, or event should be logged, try to do it as soon as possible afterwards, or ask the NCS to add it as a notation in his log.

Message Authoring

We discussed earlier in our message handling the fact that we should never be the “author” (or create) agency-related official messages. However, there are some cases such as messages that deal solely with communication. A couple examples are messages about net operations, frequencies, and requests for relief operators, radio equipment, supplies, food and water for emcomm personnel. In these instances you do have the training and authority to generate the message. These messages should also be logged, so there is a record of when a request was sent if there is any question after you have been relieved from your shift.