It May Be Radio, But the Job Is Not Finished Until the Paperwork Is Done

As emergency communicators, we constantly train in how to communicate effectively. We train to manually retune our software-controlled radios, we train and practice how to conduct communications in a net-controlled environment. We train to spot and report our observations, whether natural or manmade. We have received training in the Incident Command System (ICS) and National Incident Management System (NIMS). We've been taught the chain of command, span of command and where and how amateur radio, AuxComm, RACES and ARES fit into the master plan. And we've been trained in how to prepare ourselves, families, and homes in case of a deployment. But the one task that tends to get overlooked is the proper execution and completion of the ever-present paperwork.

* email: <w4alt@cq-amateur-radio.com>

You've heard the adage, "the job ain't finished until the paperwork is done." The same holds true in the world of EmComm. Sure, you say, we practice keeping personal logs, trading QSL cards, and populating contest logs (manually or electronically), but these forms pale when compared to the world of emergency communications paperwork.

ICS demands a very clear paper trail for pre, during, and post operations. All facets of the incident management, including amateur radio emergency communications, must be properly documented. A scan of the FEMA NIMS ICS Forms Booklet <https://bit.ly/2MvO4DL> reveals 21 relevant forms.

Forms and More Forms…

Let's take a look at some of the forms used in amateur radio EmComm:

The Incident Briefing (ICS 201) provides the Incident Commander (and the Command and

INCIDENT RADIO COMMUNICATIONS PLAN (ICS 205)

1. Incident Name:	2. Date/Time Prepared: Date: Time:	3. Operational Period: Date From: Date To: Time From: Time To:

4. Basic Radio Channel Use:

Zone Grp.	Ch #	Function	Channel Name/Trunked Radio System Talkgroup	Assignment	RX Freq N or W	RX Tone/NAC	TX Freq N or W	TX Tone/NAC	Mode (A, D, or M)	Remarks

5. Special Instructions:

6. Prepared by (Communications Unit Leader): Name: _____ Signature: _____

| ICS 205 | IAP Page _____ | Date/Time: _____ |

Incident Command System (ICS) form 205, "Incident Radio Communications Plan," outlines each radio frequency or talk group to be used in an incident response (including amateur radio frequencies), its function and who is assigned to use it. (Forms courtesy FEMA/National Incident Management System)

General Staffs) with basic information regarding the situation and the resources allocated to the incident. In addition to a briefing document, the ICS 201 also serves as an initial action worksheet and as a permanent record of the initial response to the incident.

The Incident Objectives (ICS 202) describes the basic incident strategy, objectives, command emphasis / priorities, and safety considerations for use during the next operational period.

The Incident Radio Communications Plan (ICS 205) provides information on all radio frequency or trunked radio system talk group assignments for each operational period. The plan is a summary of information obtained about available radio frequencies or talk groups and the assignments of those resources by the Communications Unit Leader for use by incident responders. Information from the Incident Radio Communications Plan on frequency or talk group assignments is normally placed on the Assignment List (ICS 204).

The 'General Message (ICS 213) is used by the incident dispatchers to record incoming messages that cannot be orally transmitted to the intended recipients. The ICS 213 is also used by the Incident Command Post and other personnel to transmit messages (e.g., resource order, incident name change, other ICS coordination issues, etc.) to the Incident Communications Center for transmission via radio or telephone to the addressee. This form is used to send any message or notification to incident personnel that requires hardcopy delivery.

The Activity Log (ICS 214) records details of notable activities at any ICS level, including single resources, equipment, task forces, etc. These logs provide basic incident activity documentation, and a reference for any after-action report.

Of all the forms listed above, the ICS 205, ICS 213, and ICS 214 will be the most frequently used by amateur radio leadership, net controllers, radio operators, and other AuxComm, RACES, and ARES positions.

A Closer Look

The purpose of the ICS 205 is to provide details of radio frequencies, tones, channels, modes, and usage. The ICS 205 provides users the ability to program their communications equipment with appropriate frequencies prior to deploying to an incident. Many local and regional jurisdictions and communications groups have a standing order ICS 205. If an amateur radio operator is redeployed to another area or served agency, the ICS 205 would be the first document I would want to see after checking in.

The ICS 214 provides individuals a resource to record details of notable activities. The logs provide basic incident activity documentation and a reference for any after-action report (AAR). Completed logs are submitted to supervisors, who forward them to the documentation unit.

John Ferguson, K3PFW, the Aux-Comm Leader for Sussex County, Delaware, tells the story of his participation in an activation where there was what seemed, at the time, an insignificant incident. Ferguson, who admittedly is not the best at taking notes, did happen to note the incident on his ICS 214. Several weeks following the event, the EOC director summoned John to his office and read him the riot act regarding an incident that took place at the event that was now in question. Ferguson was able to retrieve his copy of his ICS 214 to show the incident was documented. His hand-written note on an ICS 214 relieved Ferguson and the county from further culpability.

For a comprehensive list of ICS and other forms, visit our friends at the Montgomery County, Ohio ARES site <www.mocoares.org/Forms.htm>.

After-Action Report

One form that is not included in the ICS or ARRL list of forms is the After-Action Report. The AAR gives participants a platform to comment on their individual observations of the operation.

Analytical AARs are formal documents intended to serve as aids to per-

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GENERAL MESSAGE (ICS 213)

1. Incident Name (Optional):

2. To (Name and Position):

3. From (Name and Position):

4. Subject: 5. Date: 6. Time:

7. Message:

8. Approved by: Name: _____ Signature: _____ Position/Title: _____

9. Reply:

10. Replied by: Name: _____ Position/Title: _____ Signature: _____

ICS 213   Date/Time: _____

The ICS 213 general message form is used to record the content of any communication that needs to be delivered in writing to its addressee.

formance evaluation and improvement, by registering situation-response interactions, analyzing critical procedures, determining their effectiveness and efficiency, and proposing adjustments and recommendations.

Analytical AARs have three central objectives:

- Identifying problematic issues and needs for improvement
- Proposing measures to counteract problematic elements
- Obtaining "lessons learned"

AARs received from individuals are reviewed by local leadership and incorporated into a comprehensive report to local emergency operation agencies and other served agencies to evaluate the incident response and improve future efforts.

Google search "2017 Hurricane After Action Reports" to view various and comprehensive AARs.

Air Check

In the commercial broadcasting industry, we often record our daily transmissions, much like EOCs record their radio and telephone transactions. Why do we do this? First and foremost is culpability. Second is for clarity for the record and third is for training.

Culpability is defined as blame. If there is an issue regarding the information garnered from a communica-tion, there is a recording of each step in the communications process. If there is an issue in communicating information, a recording tells no tales.

In broadcasting, we use recordings for critique and training opportunities. Same for emergency communications. Could a transmission been verbalized differently to add clarity, and therefore efficiency, to the communication? Was there an equipment issue, such as an intermittent bad microphone or cable? A recording can provide the engineering folks a clue of what's happening. Does a member of the team have diarrhea of the mouth after keying up a mic? What better way to offer constructive criticism than to play back a recording?

As kids, we use to play the "telephone" game in which a group of 7 to 10 students would line up in a row. The teacher would whisper a short sentence in the ear of the first student, who would then turn and whisper the phrase as quickly as possible to the second, and so on. The last in line would then repeat out loud what he/she was told. Sometimes it was spot on. More often then not, it was nothing like the original phrase. It was a great exercise in communication and how a statement can turn into an unfounded rumor as it passes down the line.

Does your group record its radio transmissions? Whether it be a weekly net or a real activation, recordings can prove invaluable.

A set-up as simple as a digital voice recorder listening to a scanner or HT will do the trick. Alternatively, again using a scanner or HT connected to a computer will provide a reliable recording. Audacity, a free audio recording program <www.audacityteam.org/>, provides time code and editing capability so snippets can be extracted for training purposes.

Another option to record via computer is a paid software titled Aircheck <https://bit.ly/2lj4eUA>. For a one-time fee of $99 U.S., Aircheck will record 24/7/365. Recordings can be set up to save hourly or fractions of hours, making files easy to handle. At my broadcast station, I record every moment of every day and save the files for at least six months. Aircheck files can be opened in Audacity or any other audio software.

Recordings can add value to your communications team as well as offer a record of what was said vs. what was heard.

It's a tough world out there. Accuracy and speed count. Let's strive to get it right the first time.

ACTIVITY LOG (ICS 214)		
1. Incident Name:	2. Operational Period: Date From: Date To: Time From: Time To:	
3. Name:	4. ICS Position:	5. Home Agency (and Unit):
6. Resources Assigned:		
Name	ICS Position	Home Agency (and Unit)
7. Activity Log:		
Date/Time	Notable Activities	
8. Prepared by: Name: _____ Position/Title: _____ Signature: _____		
ICS 214, Page 1	Date/Time: _____	

The ICS 214 activity log is used not only to record the name and function of each person involved with a certain part of the response but also to log any "notable activities" that occur during a given shift. Anything out of the ordinary should be documented, both for later review and a permanent record of what happened and how it was handled.