Cole County ARES

Simulated Emergency Test

2022

After Action Report

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From Richard Kreiser
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I operated from my home station. Normally the NCS would be co-located with the Cole County EOC. However, we were unable to engage the EOC for this exercise necessitating several artificialities.

Exercise Objectives
The overarching objective of the annual Simulated Emergency Test (SET) is to provide an operating environment where radio amateurs can gain operational experience communicating under directed net control. The Cole County SET was designed to explore the use of simplex VHF/UHF frequencies in the event of local repeater failure; Test operation of ham radios installed at Served Agencies, Assess the efficiency of voice transmission of messages on ICS-213 forms, and determine the ability of Cole County ARES to respond to an emergency call-up.

What actually happened
The Exercise was announced at the August meeting Mid-Mo Amateur Radio Club so that operators were given early notice to permit them to become involved in the planning process. Only eight (8) amateurs had stated their interest in participating by the exercise date. This necessitated last minute revision of the Player Handbook to assign double duty to most of the operators. Despite numerous attempts to involve the Cole County Emergency Operations Manager in the exercise it was to no avail, after he had initially expressed interest. Therefore, it became necessary to simulate the EOC since the majority of the message traffic was directed to that location.

On the morning of the exercise the designated NCS held a final briefing of exercise participants during a breakfast meeting. Player packets were passed out which contained the final ICS-205A form, a copy of the exercise MESL, and copies of the messages they would pass.

At StartEX the NCS attempted to make contact with exercise participants via simplex frequency HVTAC6 (146.505MHz) but heard no response. Suspecting radio problems he contacted N0TKN and transferred NCS duties to him. Rapid assessment of the problem revealed an error in the frequency entry which was immediately corrected. This allowed him to resume NCS duties. The simplex test proved extremely successful and the entire exercise could conceivably have been conducted on 146.505 MHz. A monitoring station seven (7) miles to the south of ~~Je~~fferson City reported that all stations could be copied 59 except for the JCPD which was 57 due to its location.

All stations were then moved to the K0ETY VHF Repeater (147.000 MHz) with instructions that message traffic would be passed on the KB4VSP repeater (443.175 MHz). At this point the exercise was approximately 15 minutes ahead of schedule. Rather than allow a period of dead air, the decision was made to begin passing message traffic.

NCS moved the stations handling message #1 off the NCS frequency as planned and was discussed in the briefing. However, subsequent messages were passed on the NCS frequency. This negated the exercise intent of providing training and experience in utilizing standard and accepted procedures.. The last message was passed at 1130 Local time. Following a brief Hot Wash, EnDEX was announced just before noon.

Why did it happen
As previously noted, the exercise objectives were met. All participants behaved professionally and followed established procedures. This exhibited a level of experience and training that allowed them to follow the instructions set forth in the Player Handbook. Unfortunately, the frequency error in the NCS's radio altered the planned traffic handling procedure.

What are we going to do next time
During the Hot Wash several topics were discussed. Foremost among them was the need for operator training on the Kenwood TM-D700/D710 and TM-V71 radios installed at the served agencies. These radios have dual receive capability and, while not difficult to operate, require training and experience in their efficient operation.

The consensus was that while the exercise went well additional training in operating in a net environment and message handling should be considered.

It was suggested that while the simplex test was successful it was likely due to all stations using radios that were using high power. Another exercise should be devised to evaluate the effectiveness of HT radios.

It was also suggested that there should be no attempt to reconcile the discrepancies between the Cole County frequency list and the ARES District F frequency list. Check the call sign or alpha name of a channel on a list as well as the entered frequency prior to an exercise.

To say the lack of interest and participation of Cole County ARES in this year's SET is abysmal is an understatement. The Cole County ARES organization is currently without an ARES Emergency Coordinator to provide formal and continuing leadership. Yet, in spite of this, there are some 25 to 30 amateurs on the membership roster. A majority of these members were recruited at a MMARC meeting by Club board members. It would logically follow that club leadership has a stake in promoting ARES activities and encouraging members to avail themselves of training opportunities as they become available. The SET is held each year to provide training and experience in general communication as well as emergency operation. Such experience is required if amateurs expect to be useful in time of emergency. Without training and experience amateurs are not part of the solution. Rather, they are part of the problem. They can impede the efforts of those who took the time to train, acquire experience and become capable of providing emergency communication.