

Emergency Measures Radio
Group

Exercise “Messenger” Simulated Emergency Test

Exercise Report



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Exercise Scenario and Purpose

Purpose:

To have EMRG and the Red Cross – Ottawa Branch participate in a joint exercise.

Scenario:

A Tornado, traveling north-east, touched down in the south-west corner of town cutting a path of destruction 3miles long and ½ mile wide. The Red Cross has opened a reception center at the local community center and three evacuation centers in area High Schools. Red Cross is currently providing Family Reunification, Feeding and Lodging for 345 evacuees.

The telephone company’s main switching station was in the path of the tornado. It was destroyed when the microwave tower collapsed into the building. The phone company reports it will be several days before service to the community can be restored. At this time, there is limited phone coverage within the community. Cellular phone service is also affected due to the loss of the microwave tower.

ARES operators are your **only** means of communications with people external to your community.

Positive Notes

National Traffic System was utilized via the Kingsmere Traffic Net.

Red Cross members utilized ARES Radiograms for the first time.

Participation took place between ARES and the Red Cross.

Exercised installed equipment at the Red Cross.

Point for Improvement

Planning:

Any exercise that is to take place requires planning. The more organizations that are participating the more planning is required. Failure to have adequate planning can lead to a completely failed exercise, which could lead to damaged relationships with the organizations that you are working with and damaged relationships with the volunteers who have agreed to be a part of the participating organization.

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The Emergency Measures Radio Group, played a very minute role in this years Simulated Emergency Test due to insufficient planning, as a result only two members of the local group participated to fulfill the commitment to the local Ottawa Red Cross Organization.

The failure to have a fully deployed exercise was a result of inadequate preparation time for the Exercise Coordinator.

Lessons learned by the Exercise Coordinator:

Planning for an exercise involving volunteer groups should commence no less than four months ahead of the planned date. The larger the number of groups participating the longer lead time that should be taken to prepare for the exercise. Volunteers face many challenges in trying to prepare for exercises. Work commitments, family commitments, unforeseen crisis situations. Regardless, sufficient time should be taken to account to allow for unknowns to distract from exercise preparation.

Establish milestones and cut off dates to have fulfilled pieces of information:

In the preparation of an exercise, it's very easy to continuously push dates to allow for others to submit their scenarios or trigger points. Eventually, however, you squeeze out the time to allow for necessary training and or planning. Establish hard dates that materials should be ready by or that any required planning meetings should take place. If those dates are not met then eliminate that portion from the exercise or build a door to allow for minimal participation.

Exercise Designing:

Design an exercise relevant to the groups participating with you, not that of the higher level of the organization you belong or from another area. It is not possible for anyone who is not tied to the issues in your region to understand the challenges that your local groups face. Higher levels within an organization can suggest how one may want to proceed, but the actual planning should be done by those participating.

The exercise with the Red Cross had one major flaw. The Red Cross was doing the exercise as a Tabletop Exercise. Unless, a local ARES group only has 2 operators, the exercise as designed was of little value to ARES groups unless the ARES Group built a more dynamic exercise around it. A more effective exercise would have been doing the exercise live where both parties would have gained much more value and had many more participants able to partake in the exercise.

Realistic Expectations:

The exercise coordinator attended several meetings in which representatives from the Radio Amateurs of Canada ARES body expressed much excitement around participating with the Red Cross. The Red Cross groups were provided with all the documentation for their groups to participate in the Exercise by their provincial level, while ARES groups were not provided with anything more than what the Red Cross was provided with.

The exercise coordinator made a poor assumption that something similar was to be provided to ARES groups. The arrival of the documents and this realization made it difficult to properly prepare an alternative exercise. The exercise coordinator should have never assumed that this was ever going to be the case and should have sought further clarification from the Provincial level.

Insufficient notification to members on the status of the Exercise

Members of EMRG were not given sufficient warning on if the exercise was going ahead or not. This left some wondering until a cancellation message was sent at the last minute.

Radio Grams:

Radiograms have a purpose; however, their usage should be used at the discretion of local level agencies and not mandated by higher level bodies within organizations to groups below. I.e. Radiograms should be a recommendation or a guideline when nothing else is available or is implemented for message tracking.

Radiograms only advantage is that they ensure proper communication of information across multiple hops. For one to one communications, they are inefficient and time consuming.

During the SET, 6 radio grams were fed to the NTS in Ottawa, at exercise completion time, only 3 had made it to the Kingston station. The volume of traffic going through the Kingston station was very high. Any expectation of a return response in a timely manner was definitely in doubt, leaving local Red Cross with a lot of unanswered questions. This is an area that perhaps needs some review on other ways of handling the high volume with the use of radiograms.

Exercise Coordinators Note: I'd like to commend the station in Kingston trying to process the traffic as well and Jim (VE3NVK) of the Ottawa NTS who did a superb job in Ottawa of trying to handle a very large volume of traffic.

Conclusion:

The exercise was a positive attempt at having two organization work together. The provincial interaction should have stopped with the recommendation that the two groups design a joint exercise at the local levels to occur on a particular day.

Planning for any exercise should start much further than a month in advance in order for groups to get the most out of their volunteers and their exercise.

Table top exercises are a precursor to a live exercise and should be utilized as such. To have one group doing a table top and another doing a live exercise is not a highly effective exercise to Amateur radio operators, since table tops offer little for more than a couple of operators.

On a positive note, post discussion between EMRG and Ottawa Red Cross agreed that the designing of an exercise should take place between the groups as a live exercise.

The exercise coordinator learned much working with different levels of different bodies.

As the whole purpose of any exercise is to learn how to do things better the exercise was a small success, but due to inadequate preparation, the members of the local EMRG group, derived little value to themselves.