

## 2020 Simulated Emergency Test Guidelines

### *Test Your Readiness on October 3 - 4*

ARRL's Simulated Emergency Test (SET) is October 3 - 4, 2020, and this nationwide exercise is the chance to test your personal emergency-operating skills and the readiness of your communications equipment and accessories in a simulated emergency-like deployment. In consideration of the COVID-19 pandemic, please adhere to Center for Disease Control (CDC) and local health department guidelines by staying home if you can, maintaining safe distances when around people, and follow recommended cleaning and disinfecting practices at all times.

ARRL Field Organization Leaders at the section and local levels, and many other volunteers that are active in public service and emergency communications, are developing simulated emergency-like scenarios in consultation with a variety of agencies and organizations for whom radio amateurs are known to provide service during emergencies. Please note that everyone who participates in the SET must follow CDC and local health guidelines.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/>

It may not be possible to conduct an in-person emergency exercise this year. However, it is possible to adapt to the circumstances and situation at hand. Remember, station and skills readiness are tenets of the Amateur Radio Service. Any time we spend on the air will contribute to developing and practicing our personal radio communication capability.

The ARRL's Amateur Radio Emergency Service® (ARES®), the National Traffic System (NTS), the Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES), SKYWARN™, Community Emergency Response Team (CERT), Salvation Army Team Emergency Radio Network (SATERN), and other allied groups and public-service oriented radio amateurs are among those who are eligible to participate in the simulated exercise and to practice emergency operation plans, nets and procedures.

### **Establishing Relationships**

The ARRL has longstanding relationships with several national organizations including the American Red Cross, the National Weather Service, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and the Salvation Army (among several others). More information on these and other national served agencies may be found at [www.arrl.org/served-agencies-and-partners/](http://www.arrl.org/served-agencies-and-partners/).

Let this year's ARRL Simulated Emergency Test be a chance to reach out to these partners (at a safe distance and/or via on-line meetings and teleconferences) to establish or review plans and develop working relationships.

### **National Preparedness Month**

National Preparedness Month is in September. This is a nationwide effort to encourage everyone to take steps to prepare for emergencies in their homes, workplaces, schools and communities. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security works with a wide variety of organizations to highlight the importance of emergency preparedness and to promote individual involvement through events and activities across the nation. We encourage you to consider this year's Simulated Emergency Test (and all preparations for it) as a demonstration of amateur radio's readiness. More information on National Preparedness Month is found at [www.ready.gov/](http://www.ready.gov/).

## **SET to Go!**

---

In consideration of local and section wide schedules and relationships with partners, agencies and many others, ARRL Field Organization Leaders have the option of conducting their local or section wide SET at another time besides the focal-point weekend of October 3 and 4, 2020. 2020 SETs should be conducted no later than the end of the fall season or the calendar year. Check with your local ARRL Field Organization leadership for the exact date or dates of the SET in your area.

To find out how to be involved in this year's SET, please contact your local ARRL Emergency Coordinator or Net Manager. Check on upcoming planned activities through local, state or section wide nets. Contact your local club or other area clubs to find out who the Emergency Coordinator is and/or when and where the nearest ARES net or NTS net meets and their frequencies. In addition, refer to the ARRL Section Web pages at [www.arrl.org/groups/sections](http://www.arrl.org/groups/sections). Your ARRL Section Manager can assist, too. See page 16 of *QST* for contact information.

Additional background on the annual SET is presented in the article, *Simulated Emergency Test, 2019 Results*. See July, 2020, *QST*, pp. 62 – 65. Also, guidelines and specific SET reporting forms for the ARRL Section and Field Organization Leaders are posted on the ARRL Web page at [www.arrl.org/public-service-field-services-forms](http://www.arrl.org/public-service-field-services-forms).

If you are the Emergency Coordinator, Net Manager, or a Section Leader that's in charge of reporting this year's SET activity on behalf of your group or net, please download the forms from the ARRL Web page. Fill them out as appropriate and return them to [sewald@arrl.org](mailto:sewald@arrl.org) at ARRL Headquarters. Thank you.

### **Purpose of SET**

1. To find out the strengths and weaknesses of ARES, NTS, RACES and other groups in providing emergency communications.
2. To provide a demonstration--to served and partner agencies such as the American Red Cross, the emergency management agency and through the news media--of the value to the public that Amateur Radio provides, particularly in time of need.
3. To help radio amateurs gain experience in communications using standard procedures and a variety of modes under simulated-emergency conditions.

### **Format**

The scoring format reflects broad objectives and encourages use of digital modes for handling high-volume traffic and point-to-point Welfare reports out of the affected simulated- disaster area. Participants will find SET an opportunity to strengthen the VHF-HF link at the local level, thereby ensuring that ARES and NTS are working in concert. The SET will give all levels of NTS the chance to handle exercise-related traffic. The guidelines also recognize tactical traffic on behalf of served agencies.

Test messages should carry the word "TEST" before the precedence; that is, "Test Priority" on phone and "TEST P" on cw. The text of such messages should also begin with the words "TEST MESSAGE."

ARES units and other groups are free to conduct their emergency exercises anytime until the end of the calendar year if an alternative date is preferred. The activity period should not exceed 48 hours. Links to SET reporting forms and the EC Annual Report may be found at <http://www.arrl.org/public-service-field-services-forms>. You may e-mail your SET summaries to ARRL Headquarters via [sewald@arrl.org](mailto:sewald@arrl.org). If you mail them to ARRL via the postal service, the address is: ARRL Headquarters, 225 Main Street, Newington, CT 06111-1494.

February 1, 2021 is the receipt deadline.

### **Preparation is Important**

#### **Steps for the Emergency Coordinator and Net Manager**

**Please note that everyone who participates in the SET must follow CDC and local health guidelines. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/>**

Because of the pandemic, it may not be possible to conduct an in-person emergency exercise this year and/or in-person meetings related to the test. However, it is possible to adapt to the circumstances and situation at hand. Conducting a “tabletop” exercise via a combination of teleconferences, video conferences, and/or on-the-air meetings and on-the-air nets can work very well for this year’s Simulated Emergency Test.

1. Sign up all available amateurs in the area under your jurisdiction and work them into your SET plans.
2. Call an on-the-air meeting or video/teleconference of all ARES members and prospective members to briefly outline the SET activities, and give general instructions. Do this in a socially-distant manner that is safe for everyone.  
Do not divulge the exact time or nature of the test to participants at this time. Take this opportunity to register new ARES members and get up-to-date information on other participants.
3. Contact served and partner agencies and explain the intent and overall purpose of the SET. Offer to send test messages to other branches of their agencies. Contact should be conducted by telephone, or other virtual means with proper social distancing measures in place.
4. Contact officials of any adjacent communities having no active amateurs by telephone or virtual format. Offer to provide representation in amateur networks for them as well.
5. Arrange publicity in consultation with an ARRL Public Information Officer in local newspapers and radio/TV stations by preparing an announcement and/or inviting the press to observe your group’s SET operation if there happens to be an in-person deployment as part of the exercise. Or, if it’s convenient or suitable, ask the media representative to conduct an interview via on-line video, or telephone.
6. Set up liaison with one or more NTS local/section nets (if you don’t already have liaison) so you will have an outlet for all messages out of the local area.
7. Formulate your plans around a simulated disaster. Possible “plots” include: a flood, a serious fire, an ice storm, a missing person, a serious accident (automobile, bus, aircraft, for examples), a broken gas line, and so forth. Elaborate on the situation by developing a scenario, but please be realistic.

### **During the SET**

1. Announce the simulated emergency situation. Activate the emergency net. Dispatch mobiles if necessary to the simulated emergency scene or to the area where the served agencies or partner organizations are situated. **Because of the pandemic, these deployments may be or should be simulated for the safety of everyone involved.**
2. Have designated stations originate messages on behalf of served agencies. Test messages may be sent simulating requests for supplies. Simulated emergency messages (just like real emergency messages) should be signed by an authorized official even if the authorized officials are not physically in the area because of social-distancing requirements.
3. Emphasize tactical communications for served agencies and partner organizations.
4. As warranted by traffic loads, have liaison stations on hand to receive traffic on the local net and relay to your section net. You should also be sure that there is a representative on each session of the section net to receive traffic going to the local area.
5. Operate at least one session (or substantial segment of a session) of the local net on emergency-only basis. Or, if a repeater is on emergency power, allow only emergency-powered stations to operate

through the repeater for a certain time period.

### **After the SET**

An important post-SET activity is a critique session to discuss the test results. All SET participants may be invited to a virtual meeting using on-line meeting tools or a teleconference to review good points and weaknesses apparent in the drill. Emphasize ways to improve procedures, techniques, and coordination with all groups involved. Please report your group's effort using the appropriate forms and include any photos, clippings and other items of interest.

### **The Role of NTS**

The main function of the National Traffic System in an emergency situation is to tie together all of the various local activities and to provide a means by which all traffic destined outside of a local area, section or region can be systematically relayed to the addressee.

Normal NTS routing should be followed. A valid exception is the handling of emergency traffic that should be routed as rapidly and efficiently as possible, bypassing various levels of nets when delivery can be expedited. Another exception is when one station is loaded down with traffic for one region or section. At the discretion of the Net Control Station (NCS), the station may be directed to bypass a normal channel and go directly to a lower (or higher) echelon net.

The interface between NTS and ARES lies in the liaison function between local nets and other NTS nets, particularly at the section level. Responsibility for representation of the local network on the section net lies with the local net manager who may or may not be the ARRL Emergency Coordinator. Although we usually think of ARES members being the representatives in section nets, it is equally valid to expect NTS personnel to act as liaison to local nets.

At least one net session or substantial segment of a session should be conducted on emergency power. Plan a surprise session or two. Advise the NCS just before net time. If the NCS is unable to operate on emergency power, then someone else must be net control. Only stations operating on emergency power may report in during this time.

### **Summary**

One of the first steps on the way to a successful SET is to try to get as many people involved as possible. In a real emergency, we find amateurs with all sorts of varied interests coming out of the "woodwork." Let's get them involved and informed through the SET so they will know more about how emergency communications can be and should be handled. Promote the SET on nets and repeaters ahead of time to sign up prospective participants.

Thanks to your efforts, the public service tradition in Amateur Radio continues! Stay well and stay safe!