Mecklenburg County ARES©

What are the duties of Net Control Station (NCS)?

With few exceptions, emergency communication missions almost always involve the establishment of an emergency net. Each night our local clubs and organizations hold nets so that the Hams in our area can practice their communications skills. Every one of these directed nets has a Net Control Station who is also practicing his or her net control skills.

The primary goal of a Net Control Station (NCS) is to establish an on air communication network that can be used to effectively communicate during times of an emergency, to streamline the process of passing messages between stations and to maintain order in what could otherwise be a chaotic situation. Net Control Stations are like a traffic cop.

To accomplish this goal, The Net Control Station (NCS) must be able to both receive and transmit effectively throughout the coverage area of the Net. If the Net Control Station (NCS) is unsure of their receive and transmit capabilities, they should begin the Net with a check of that coverage. In the event the Net Control Station (NCS) cannot provide adequate communications they should transfer the duties to another station that can.

The Net Control Station (NCS) needs to keep track of all amateur radio stations participating in the Net and accurately log all Net activity. To accomplish this, the Net Control Station (NCS) should establish a logging system which provides a permanent record of the Net's activities. Stations logging in and out of the net are recorded, as are the messages which need to be passed and the messages or announcements that have been successfully passed.

The Net Control Station (NCS) should handle the highest precedence messages first. Emergency and Priority messages always have priority over Welfare and Routine traffic. To minimize the average duration between the when a message is listed and when it is sent, the Net Control Operator may ask stations to pass traffic on an alternate repeater or frequency.

The Net Control Station (NCS) should always strive to increase the traffic throughput of the Net. By eliminating unnecessary chatter, employing additional frequencies for handling traffic during peak activity times, establishing Point-to-Point stations, making use of digital modes and recruiting additional amateur radio stations into the Net, the Net Control Station (NCS) can dramatically increase the overall efficiency the Net.

The Net Control Station (NCS) should use all available resources to insure the continued effectiveness of the Net. To accomplish this last goal, the Net Control Station (NCS) can ask the participating amateur radio stations for help or advice, frequently solicit new check-ins to the Net and time schedule both the Net Control Station (NCS) and or other participating amateur radio stations to reduce stress and avoid fatigue.

This is a very broad overview of the duties of a Net Control Station (NCS) and not intended to be all inclusive.

It is highly recommended that all Amateurs get at least some experience being a Net Control Station. The two main nets in our area are the Metrolina Two Meter Emergency Net, which is held at 9 PM nightly on this repeater and the Piedmont Spotter Group Net which is held at 8 PM nightly on the 145.230 repeater. Both of the nets are an excellent example of training for emergency situations. I'm sure that either net will gladly accept volunteers for backup net control positions. This will give you additional experience which will be very useful in serving our community during times of disaster.

The next time you check into a net thank your net control station. They are all volunteers and without them we wouldn't have daily nets. They also are responsible for reporting the number of check-ins, the net duration and amount of traffic passed so we can preserve our bands for Ham radio use.