

ARRL Simulated Emergency Test (SET)

The Simulated Emergency Test (SET)

The ARRL Simulated Emergency Test is a scored nationwide full-scale emergency communication exercise involving ARES, NTS, and others. The SET weekend gives ARES communicators the opportunity to test the emergency communication capability within their community while interacting with NTS nets. The SET weekend is held in October and is announced in *QST*. If the national date is inconvenient for any Section or local group, they may conduct their SET anytime between September 1st and November 30th, although this may diminish its usefulness. The activity period for the SET should not exceed 48 hours.

The Simulated Emergency Test is an essential element in the annual training plan for all ARES groups and NTS nets. Many groups will hold several smaller “partial system” exercises leading up to the SET, and use the SET as an annual full-scale test of their emcomm systems.

Goals of the SET

The general goals for all participants include the following:

1. To discover the strengths and weaknesses of ARES and NTS, the Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES) and other groups providing Amateur Radio emergency communications by testing operational plans and skills.
2. To test the full range of emcomm systems under realistic conditions.
3. To provide a public demonstration to served agencies such as Red Cross and emergency management agencies of Amateur Radio’s value to the public in time of need.
4. To help operators gain further experience using standard procedures and a variety of modes under simulated-emergency conditions.
5. With the help of the scoring system, compare performance with previous years and other groups to help maintain a program of continuous improvement.

Each Section and local group should set its own goals for the SET. If the Section establishes the basic scenario, such as a hurricane or tornado, the local group’s goals should fit into the Section’s plan.

In addition to the overall goal of testing the entire system, all goals should be as specific as possible. For instance, you might want to stress a particular net or mode, such as packet, to see what its capabilities are under load and how it interfaces with other system elements. If a new reporting form is being used, this is a good chance to see how it works in a total-system test. Be sure your SET plan reflects the goal and provides clear guidance for all participants.

Beware of setting too many smaller goals for one SET, unless the goal is to create confusion and high levels of stress. This is not recommended for a drill situation in most cases, unless your volunteers have been prepared for it and warned well in advance. Volunteers who will accept high stress levels in a real emergency may not be willing to do so during a drill, and you might lose some members.

SET National Scoring Format

The nationwide scoring system implemented by ARRL allows ARES groups to compare their scores with those of other groups, and with their own scores from previous years.

The items scored reflect the SET's broad objectives, and encourages the following:

- Participation by as many members as possible
- Recruitment of new hams into emcomm groups
- Use of digital modes for handling high-volume traffic
- Messages originated on behalf of served agencies
- Point-to-point Welfare reports out of an affected simulated-disaster area.
- Publicity

Local Scoring

In addition to the *official* ARRL scores, your group might wish to measure other aspects of your group's performance. Local scores can provide an essential basis for corrective feedback to your group and can assist in tracking group progress over time. These scores should be kept separate from the ARRL scores to avoid confusion.

Developing local scores entails three steps:

- (a) Identify the specific items you wish to measure,
- (b) establish a standard of performance for each (such as "at least 80% participation or accuracy") and
- (c) assign each standard a numerical score.

You can "weight" the importance of the various standards by assigning different points to each. For instance, if you wish to place greater emphasis on participation, you might assign "80% participation" a score of 20 points, while "coming prepared with a bag lunch" might only be worth one point. To make it easier to understand and compare scores, the total local score should be 100.

NTS in the SET

The SET plan should test the main emergency functions of NTS – tying together the various local nets in an affected area, and moving messages into and out of the affected area. NTS Section level net managers should contact their local counterparts to ensure that NTS nets will be available at the times required in the SET plan.

Liaison stations, particularly at the Section level, handle the interface between NTS and ARES. Responsibility for representation of the local network on the Section nets lies with the local net manager. Testing this linkage is a key objective of the SET.

Preparing for the SET

Once a plan is developed, a meeting of all group members and prospective members should be called to briefly outline SET activities, and give general instructions. ECs should contact served agencies and explain the intent and overall purpose of the SET, offer to send test messages to other branches of their agencies, and invite officials to ARES meetings and SET operating sites. Publicity through local newspapers and

radio/TV stations can be arranged in consultation with a local or Section ARRL Public Information Officer.

During the SET

The “disaster” is announced and the emergency net is activated. Stations are dispatched to activate stations at served agencies. Designated stations originate messages on behalf of served agencies. Test messages may be sent simulating requests for supplies, or notifying agency staff of the “current situation.”

Simulated emergency messages, (just like real emergency messages), should be signed by an authorized official, *but only if they are participating*. However, it is vitally important that **all** test messages begin and end with a statement that it is a “drill,” “practice,” or “simulated” message. You really cannot say it too often – you should even insert it into the middle of a long message. If this is not done, members of the public or news agencies with scanners might mistake the messages for the “real thing” – it has happened.

After the SET

As soon as possible after the SET has ended, participants should meet in person or on the air to analyze and discuss the test results. For this reason, it is always a good idea to ask each participant to take appropriate notes during the event. Identify the efforts that worked as intended as well as those that did not. Make specific recommendations for changes to plans and needs for specific training.

A complete set of reporting forms are automatically mailed to appropriate ARRL Field Organization appointees, and can be furnished to other groups upon request. The deadline for receipt of all reports at ARRL HQ is January 31.