After Action Report
County Communications Exercise
Net Control

Santa Clara County
ARES/ RACES/ACS

1. Overview

Description: County Communications Exercise
Event Date: April 18, 2015
Duration: 0600-1400
Activation #: XSC -15-05T
Submitted By: Tim Howard, KE6TIM, Net Manager

1. Introduction and Background

The report covers the Santa Clara County ARES/RACES/ACS activation in support of a county wide communications exercise designed to practice mobilization, deployment and demobilization of amateur radio operations. The activities were varied and have been designed to provide fun and education while, at the same time, developing experience with operating according to the standard procedures required for emergency operations.

2. Type/Location of Event

Event Type: Exercise/Drill
Event Activation #: XSC-15-04T
Event Name: County Communications Exercise
Event Location: Ed Levin County Park, 3100 Calaveras Rd., Milpitas, CA

3. Description of Event

Exercise attendees had the option to sign up for various types of assignments from: Field Operations, Net, Control, Packet, and WiFi/Mesh Operations.

Net control responsibilities included the Resource Net to track participants to and from the exercise and Tactical Nets to provide communications with Field Operations participants.

4. Chronological Summary of Events

18-April-2015, Saturday

Time	Description, Note, Comment
0530	Link AA6BT, N6NAC and W6ASH 2 meter.
0600	Event staff arrives at site. SCC RACES trailer on-site.
0600	Start set-up of Staging and Radio Room.
0630	W6ASH 220 Repeater linked to W6ASH 2m repeater.
0700	County Resource Net begins tracking resources to Staging.
0800	Tactical Net active.
1300	Resource Net transitions to operator working from home.
1315	Exercise terminated.
1415	Gear packed and staff departed site.

5. Personnel

Staff
Tim Howard, KE6TIM – Net Manager/Planner
Mike Kutner, N6IHT – Radio Room Supervisor

Net Control Operators
Nigel Gore, AF6ZK
Judy Halchin, KK6EWQ – N3 Eval
Michael Kenniston, K6GA
Herbert Lewis, AF6HL – N3 Eval
Donald McKee, KE6DM
Patrick Muffler, KG6TMI
Janie Taylor, KI6SER – (Demobilization Resource Net operation from home)

6. Improvements, Conclusions, Recommendations

What worked?

Because of the parks location, both AA6BT and N6NAC could not be reached from within the park. Preliminary testing indicated that the W6ASH repeaters would work within the park and on the narrow canyon while traveling into the park.   After consulting with the repeater owners it was determined that we would use the 220 W6ASH repeater for Resource Net Control from within the park. This reduced the number of 2 meter frequencies in use within the park.

Participants were instructed to use the W6ASH 2 meter repeater for communication with the Resource Net while traveling East of Interstate 680 into the park.

The Resource Net was transitioned to an operator working from home slightly before 1300.

Resource Net operations worked without any issues for the exercise.

The County Comm trailer was located immediately next to the "Radio Room" (pop-up and tables) so set-up time was kept to a minimum. Because the radio room was located away from the main participant locations we did not have the typical flow of people into the area which often results in undue noise and disruption for the net control operators.

What didn't work / needs improvement?

Initial plans were to have two tactical nets to process message traffic from field operators. Because of the limited number of people who signed up for net control we were limited to one tactical net. We also did not have enough staff to provide both a radio operator and a scribe so all nets initially operated without a scribe.

Field operators were given assignments to send as many of their assigned messages as they could in a two hour period. Their assignment consisted of seven formal ICS-213 messages and three informal messages. The expectation was that most operators would not come anywhere close to sending all ten messages in two hours.

As it turned out there was confusion on the part of field operators, many thought that they had to send all ten messages. In addition what was intended to be three informal messages from each operator were actually sent as formal ICS-213 messages. The result was a large cue waiting to send messages during the middle of the exercise.

To mitigate this we kept a couple of operators past their allocated shift end time to provide a scribe for the tactical net. Of the six net control operators, four had other activities to take part in during the exercise so we were not able to keep additional operators much past their normal shift schedule. The Radio Room Supervisor took over the Resource Net near the end of the exercise (before it was passed to the off-site operator) so we could free up someone to perform scribe duties.

By using scribes where we could and moving more experienced operators to the Tactical Net, the backlog of messages waiting to be received was reduced at times; however, there were a number of frustrated field operators who could not send all of their messages.

One operator was an hour late for their Net Control shift which added to the already thin ranks.

Recommendations

Assuming 2 to 3 minutes is needed to send an ICS-213 message; the number of messages that can be processed per hour is 20 to 30. Some consideration needs to be made in future drills regarding the number of nets that can be staffed, the number of field operations participants that will be sending messages, and the type and quantity of messages to be sent by each operator.

Clearer instructions to the field operators to ensure they understood that they did not need to send all ten messages would have helped.

Stress that net control operators need to make their scheduled shift on time. One operator was lost and could not find the park driving well past it. Already late at that point, he finally arrived at the radio room an hour late for his scheduled shift.

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7. Recovery Activities (as applicable)

Recovery activities were limited to returning equipment to the SCC RACES trailer.

End of Report

Revision Control

Rev	Description of changes	By Whom
1.0	Initial document creation – 04-27-2015	Tim Howard