

Basic Training: an Individual Checklist

Why Training Is Important!

- Small disasters
- Large disasters
- Communications failures (911 etc.)

Education and training are important because you need to have confidence that you can execute the required steps in the shortest amount of time, with the minimum amount of wasted motion. Hesitancy and indecisiveness will quickly tire you, as you are expending more mental energy than required, and that would soon dull your senses. So, educate yourself and train before the skills are needed.

What You Need To Do. As a *REACT* member you have already taken the first important step: you are part of a group organized for the purpose of providing emergency communications.

Undergo an educational/training program. There are training materials available from *REACT* International headquarters. Additional training materials may be available from your state or area *REACT* Council. Most Teams have local training programs available through their local emergency management agency and other organizations they serve. Teams and members also have access to training materials and training opportunities from other organizations through National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD), their state VOAD chapter, and individual organizations with which *REACT* International has formal Memorandums of Understanding, including the American Red Cross, the Salvation Army, and the National Weather Service. There are also often community programs available to the general public through the local emergency management agency. One of the best sources of training is FEMA's Emergency Management Institute which provides a large number of free online training courses. The FEMA Independent Study Courses are mentioned several places in this manual and are covered in more detail in Appendix C.

Unlearn what you thought you knew. There are false concepts on emergency communications that are due to people's impressions and are not based on what has been tested and evaluated in actual field experience. Some of the most important emergency communications operating principles differ from regular daily radio practices, simply because emergency communications will require a network of message relay stations to be set up from scratch and operating within minutes or hours of an activation. This is something that is not done routinely by hobby radio operators in the normal course of enjoying the pastime. It is important to seek out educational material that is based on sound practices refined with actual field experience. Be open to learning new material, and the reasons it works.

Work as a team. Unlike individual radio operators operating from a single station at home or in the mobile, emergency communications involves radio operators forming teams and relaying messages using both similar and dissimilar techniques. This has been the focus of *REACT* since it was founded in 1962. This is one reason why membership in *REACT* has always been through the formation of local Teams.

Be flexible. Knowledgeable emergency communicators know very well that it's not a case of choosing which method is the "single one-size-fits-all method" for getting the job done but rather that it's a mix of techniques, whichever is appropriate for that particular message. This is a strength of *REACT's* all-mode/all-service approach, which encourages Teams to take fullest advantage of all available resources by using the capabilities of different licensed and unlicensed radio services.

Work with your local emergency management agency. The emergency communicator must operate as part of a system with many levels. Each level has its own special requirements and procedures. While the lower levels of the operations may resemble and borrow from our personal experience as radio operators and technicians, it requires personal growth to operate in a challenging environment such as the one that materializes during an emergency.

Learn about the Incident Command System.

Learn about emergency management agencies in your area.

Learn about how disaster declarations are escalated from the city or county official, to the state governor, to the nation's president – paving the way for outside relief and aid.

Learn about how requests for mutual aid are handled within your community during a disaster.

Find out about the notification/activation tree for emergency communicators and sign-up as a team member.

Take a first aid and CPR course. It is knowledge you can use anytime, anywhere.

Equip yourself:

- Get a NOAA Weather Radio with digital Specific Area Message Encoding (SAME) alert. Program it with the code or codes for your area.
- Put together a quick deployment bag with your spare radio equipment, antennas, coax, clipboard, pens, IDs, etc.
- Place your checklist of last minute items (fresh batteries, water, etc.) with the bag to help ensure you don't forget anything.
- Put together a pack consisting of personal items (clothing, medications, etc.) you would need to take care of yourself for 72 hours in an emergency. This is useful for both field deployment and emergency evacuation.

Learn about emergency communications procedures:

- Practice checking into and out of nets. Practice operating in a net.
- Practice becoming Net Control.
- Practice sending and receiving messages in the format adopted by your Team based on the agencies or organizations you expect to serve.
- Practice participating in a tactical network during events such as a parade or marathon.
- Learn about emergency communications equipment.
- Learn and practice each of the communications techniques you are licensed for.

Learn about the agencies you will serve and about the training opportunities available from other organizations in your area. Team leaders need to take an active role in coordinating with other organizations and agencies:

- Check with your local ARES and RACES officials.
- Check with your local amateur radio clubs.
- Check with your local emergency response agencies: Civil Defense, American Red Cross, National Weather Service, Salvation Army, etc.
- Check with your local church and denomination.

Participate in joint training and drills whenever possible.