
ARES NET CONTROL STATION

ROUTINE TRAFFIC PROCEDURE

JOHNSON CITY-WASHINGTON COUNTY TN ARES



Compiled by: Martin Mozingo, KY6U
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Contents

I.	Introduction and Background Info	3
II.	Form ICS-213 Description	4 - 5
III.	Completing the ICS-213	6 - 8
	A. Preamble	6 - 7
	B. Text	8
IV.	Sample Message	9 - 11
	A. Ready to send	10
	B. Listing the traffic	11
	C. Transmitting the message	11
V.	Reply Message	12 - 15
	A. Ready to Reply	14
	B. Transmitting the reply	15
VI.	Final Comments	16
VII.	FEMA Form ICS-213	17
VIII.	ITU Phonetic Alphabet	18

The ICS 213 General Message Form

BACKGROUND

The ICS-213 General Message Form began as a multipart self-copying form for use as an interoffice memo. The layout and use of the ICS-213 form have changed significantly since its inception. The ICS-213 has become the basic written communications document between all areas of emergency response. Users are often located at separate locations and use the ICS-213 form to communicate real time events.

Messages originate at one location, are transmitted to another site, and a response may be returned to the originator. The reply message can be combined with the original message for the convenience of the originator.

The format of the ICS-213 message form is specified by the served agency. Just as the Incident Command System is adaptable to various incidents; the methods of communications are matched to the situation. The ICS-213 message form may be transmitted by voice, digital, or even hand carried to get the job done.

The form ICS-213 form can be found at the FEMA ICS Resource Center website at:

<https://training.fema.gov/icsresource/icsforms.aspx>

ARES ROLE

The ARES communications volunteer is committed to accurately, rapidly handling information for the benefit of the served agency. ARES operators rely on their equipment, training, and ingenuity in meeting the demands of served agency communications. ARES members must keep abreast of new applications and techniques in emergency communications.

ARES role in emergency communications is to move information from point A to point B at the request of the Served Agency. ARES volunteers perform this task using communications procedures developed to provide accurate rapid emergency communications.

The ICS-213 Form

The ICS-213 consists of five areas that are familiar to everyone who has handled NTS format traffic.

GENERAL MESSAGE (ICS 213)			
HEADER TO: line FROM: line SUBJECT DATE TIME	1. Incident Name (Optional):		
	2. To (Name and Position):		
	3. From (Name and Position):		
	4. Subject:	5. Date:	6. Time
MESSAGE TEXT	7. Message:		
SIGNATURE – Message originator	8. Approved by: Name: _____ Signature: _____ Position/Title: _____		
	9. Reply:		
REPLY - Optional			
SIGNATURE – Reply originator	10. Replied by: Name: _____ Position/Title: _____ Signature: _____		
	ICS 213	Date/Time: _____	

Let's take a closer look at each of the message elements on the next page.

HEADER

The information in both the TO: and FROM: lines must contain enough information to deliver the message. Obviously, this will include the Name, Location, and Title or Position, for each party.

An example TO and FROM: lines would look like this:

TO: Mike Hensley / Shelter West Manager

FROM: Carl Gregory / EOC Commander

The subject line is a concise title for the message that highlights the important point of the message.

A SUBJECT might read as follows:

SUBJECT: SITE REP Request

The person originating the message will complete the HEADER information and the MESSAGE TEXT. You may be given verbal instructions to "Send a message to X telling them . . .".

You will then fill out the ICS-213 form, get the message okayed by the originator and send the message.

MESSAGE TEXT

The message text area contains the information to be transmitted. The message should be concise with non-essential words eliminated. Be direct and to the point. Punctuation in the message is indicated with the word X-Ray. Punctuation, such as commas, parenthesis, question marks are generally not essential to the information and should not be used. Do not end the message text with an X-Ray.

Each word or group of numbers in the text is counted as one word. The sending station can do many things to clarify the "words" in the text when sending the message. We will look at these techniques when sending a sample message.

The message text area is defined during message transmission by the proword BREAK immediately before the first word of the text and immediately following the last word of the text.

SIGNATURE

This identifies the sender of the message (or reply) and should contain enough information to locate the sender if a reply is received.

REPLY

The reply message follows the same guidelines as the Message Text.

Note: The reply message should reference the message number of the original message. This allows the receiving station to match the reply with the original message.

Completing the ICS-213 Form

PREAMBLE

The basic ICS-213 form does not contain the pre-printed 'Radiogram' format for the preamble. The trained ARES operator writes the preamble items on the top margin of the ICS-213 form. Sending the ICS-213 form begins with the same preamble used in the NTS format.

The preamble contains the following elements:

Number	Precedence	HX__	Orig Stn	Check	Place	Time	Date
#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8

BLOCK #1 – MESSAGE NUMBER:

This is the serial number assigned by the station that first puts the message into written format. Essentially a message serial number for that station.

BLOCK #2 - PRECEDENCE:

The precedence tells everyone the relative urgency of a message.

There are four levels of precedence: Routine, Welfare, Priority, and EMERGENCY. Routine -- abbreviated with the letter "R." Most Amateur traffic is handled using this precedence □ it is for all traffic that does not meet the requirements for a higher precedence. In a disaster situation, routine messages are seldom sent.

Welfare -- abbreviated as "W." Used for an inquiry as to the health and welfare of an individual in a disaster area, or a message from a disaster victim to friends or family. Generally limited to health and welfare inquiries on a Red Cross message net.

Priority -- abbreviated as "P." For important messages with a time limit; official messages not covered by the EMERGENCY precedence or a notification of death or injury in a disaster area. This precedence is usually associated with official traffic to, from, or related to a disaster area.

EMERGENCY -- there is no abbreviation for the word EMERGENCY is always spelled out. Use this for any message having life or death urgency. The use of this precedence should generally be limited to traffic originated and signed by authorized agency officials. Due to the lack of privacy on radio, EMERGENCY messages should only be sent via Amateur Radio when regular communication facilities are unavailable.

If you have ANY doubts about using the EMERGENCY precedence, do not use it.

BLOCK #3 – HANDLING INSTRUCTIONS:

This is an optional field used at the discretion of the originating station. The handling instructions contain shorthand instructions for routine message actions. Three of the seven standard HX pro-signs may be used in emergency communications.

The three are listed below:

1. HXC -- Report date and "time of delivery" (TOD) to originating station.
2. HXD -- Report to originating station the identity of the station who delivered the message, plus date, time and method of delivery. Also, each station to report identity of station to which relayed, plus date and time. (This traces the message through the network. Seldom used.)
3. HXE -- Delivering station to get and send reply from addressee. When multiple instructions are used the elements are combined in the Precedence: HXCE.

BLOCK #4 - STATION OF ORIGIN:

This is the FCC call sign of the first ham that put the message into written format.

BLOCK #5 - THE CHECK:

The check is the number of 'words' in the text section only. Include any "periods" or punctuation (written as "X," spoken as "X-Ray"). 'Words' used in determining the CHECK are defined as unique blocks of information and may include numbers, dates, times, etc., in addition to what is usually thought of as words.

BLOCK #6 - PLACE OF ORIGIN:

This is the location specified by the originator in the TO: line on the ICS-213 form. This information will determine where a reply will be sent, if needed.

BLOCK #7 - TIME FILED:

This is the time as specified in the SUBJECT: line of the ICS-213 form. During emergencies, use "local time" with indicators such as CST or CDT to eliminate confusion by emergency management personnel. Use 24-hour (Military) format. If there is a delay in transmitting the message, insert the time the message is entered into the system in place of the time in the subject line.

BLOCK #8 - DATE:

This is the date the message was created as listed in the SUBJECT: line of the ICS-213 form. Be sure to use the same date as the time zone indicated in Block 7. Use the form of DAY MONTH i.e. 23 Jun.

The preamble is created by the ARES member and transmitted before the actual ICS-213 form. The information in the preamble is written across the top of the ICS-213 form in the top margin. This information is used to track message receipt and delivery and improve accuracy. Emergency personnel other than amateur radio operators would not necessarily be familiar with the message preamble.

The HEADER and the TEXT are separated by the proword BREAK just as in NTS traffic.

SENDING THE TEXT

When sending the text, speak slowly and clearly. Remember you are sending information. This is not a dramatic reading. Take your time and spell unusual words or words that sound alike with different meanings. For example: see / sea / initial charlie, to / too / two, for / four, our / hour, to name a few.

Use the proper procedure to spell words phonetically; pronounce the word, the prowords I SPELL, spell the word phonetically, pronounce the word again. Remember the process is Say It, Spell It, Say It again.

When a word begins with a letter but contains a number, like an amateur callsign, use I SPELL and spell the callsign phonetically. I SPELL Kilo Alpha Zero Foxtrot Oscar Juliet.

When a word begins with a number, use the proword FIGURES. For example, a transistor (2N3055) would be sent as FIGURES Two November Three Zero Five Five.

Numbers with a unit attached are a common source of error in the message check. Proper procedure by the sending station can eliminate any questions. When a time occurs in the message text, such as 1500Hrs, the sending procedure determines whether this counts as one word or two. If the time is sent as, "FIGURES one five zero zero hotel romeo sierra", it is counted as one word. If the time is transmitted as, "FIGURES one five zero zero Hours," it is counted as two words.

When you are asked to write that actual text for the message from verbal instructions, remember to Keep It Simple! Use the minimum number of words necessary to get the idea across. Write your text in a way that punctuation other than a period is not needed. Questions are apparent by the wording used. Use the proword XRAY when a period is needed.

Do not end the text with a period (XRAY). It is not needed and adds needless complication to accurately passing the information.

The text ends with the proword BREAK.

Send the signature, spelling the sender's name and title phonetically if needed.

End your transmission with the prowords BREAK NO MORE, OVER. You can expect the receiving station to reply either; ROGER, KA0ABC, OUT, or request fills using the correct procedure i.e. Say Again All After, Say Again All From xxxxx to yyyy, or Say Again Word After xxx.

The procedures used in sending and receiving the text of a Form ICS-213 message are exactly as NTS traffic.

SAMPLE MESSAGE

Let's look at a sample message and go through the process of composing and sending a Form ICS-213 message.

You are providing communications support for a Red Cross shelter. The Shelter Manager stops by the communications table and asks you to send a message.

"I just found out we are going to be receiving two busses of people needing food and meals for tonight and tomorrow. "Better figure on at least 45 additional shelter residents. "They should be here by about 3:00 PM. "We'll need cots, blankets, and care kits for them. Send the message to Lisa McMillan in Mass care at the EOC. Ask when we can expect delivery."

Now your job is to sort out the basic facts and write the message text. One version might look like this:

45	CLIENTS	ARRIVING	1500HRS	X
NEED	45	ADDITIONAL	MEALS	COTS
BLANKETS	CARE	KITS	X	REPLY
WITH	ETA			

Read the message text to your shelter manager to make sure you have everything covered. It looks like you got the idea across in seventeen words. That is your CHECK for the message.

The shelter manager asked for the estimated time of arrival for the supplies, so you will have a Handling Instruction asking for a reply, HXE.

Now it is time to fill out the actual ICS-213 message form.

Print the Preamble across the top of the ICS-213 form. This information is only used by the radio operators and need not concern the emergency personnel.

JOHNSON CITY-WASHINGTON COUNTY TN ARES ROUTINE TRAFFIC PROCEDURE

No.	precedence	HX	Origin Stn	Check	Place of Origin	Time	Date
32	routine	hxe	wb4fa	17	west shelter	1210	23Jun

GENERAL MESSAGE			
TO: Lisa McMillan		POSITION: EOC Red Cross TN East	
FROM: Sarah Hensley		POSITION: West Shelter Manager	
SUBJECT: Additional clients		DATE: 23 Jun	TIME: 1200
MESSAGE:			
45 CLIENTS ARRIVING 1500HRS X NEED 45 ADDITIONAL MEALS COTS BLANKETS CARE KITS X REPLY WITH ETA			
SIGNATURE: Sarah Hensley		POSITION: West Shelter Manager	
REPLY:			
DATE:	TIME:	SIGNATURE/POSITION:	

LISTING THE TRAFFIC

The NECOS usually makes a call for traffic at regular intervals usually along with a net ID. If the net has been quiet you can list your traffic by announcing your tactical call, "WEST SHELTER, OVER." The NECOS will acknowledge your call by saying, "West Shelter, this is NECOS OVER."

You list your traffic as follows:

"This is West Shelter with one routine for EOC, OVER."

NECOS directs your traffic by responding, "West shelter, call EOC and pass one routine, OUT."

EOC responds first saying, "This is EOC, ready to copy, OVER."

TRANSMITTING THE FORM ICS-213 MESSAGE

You begin with the phrase, This is West Shelter, MESSAGE FOLLOWS.

Then start with the preamble:

Three Four, Routine, Hotel Xray Echo, I SPELL Whiskey Bravo Four Foxtrot Alpha, Figures, one six, West Shelter, Figures one two one zero, figures two three June

(NOTE: DO NOT send the headings for the precedence categories i.e. number, precedence, call sign, etc.)

(Unkey your mic to give the receiving station the chance to catch up.)

TO: Lisa, I SPELL Lima India Sierra Alpha Lisa, McMillan, I SPELL Mike Charlie Mike India Lima Lima Alpha November, McMillan, EOC, Red Cross TN East.

FR: Sarah, I SPELL Sierra Alpha Romeo Alpha Hotel, Sarah, Hensley, I SPELL Hotel Echo November Sierra Lima Echo Yankee, Hensley, West Shelter Manager.

Additional Clients, FIGURES Two Three June, FIGURES one two zero zero

BREAK (Unkey your mic again to give the receiving station a chance to catch up)

Figures four five clients arriving Figures one five zero zero Hotel Romeo Sierra XRAY need Figures four five additional meals cots blankets care kits XRAY
reply with I Spell Echo Tango Alpha

BREAK (Unkey your mic again to give the receiving station a chance to catch up)

Signed: Sarah Hensley West Shelter Manager

BREAK no more OVER

You do not need to spell the signature phonetically because you sent that information as part of the TO line. Hopefully, the receiving station responds after a short delay by saying, "N0ZGE ROGER OUT."

REPLY MESSAGE

Let's look at composing and sending a reply to an incoming form ICS-213 message. We'll use the example message to practice with.

The reply message needs to have its own preamble. The reply is treated as a new message originated by the station sending the reply.

The message number would be the serial number assigned by the station entering the reply message into the radio net. The remaining items in the preamble: Precedence, Instructions – if any, Originating Station, Check – words in the Reply text, Place of origin, Time Date, all apply to the sending station.

The Header: To, From, Subject, Date, Time will be found on the original message. The To and From lines will probably be reversed to show the sender and receiver of the reply message.

The Subject contains the addition of the message number of the original message to allow the receiving station to match the reply to the original message.

The message text and signature follow the same guides as the original outgoing message. Assume you are at your post when Lisa drops this message on your table:

No.	precedence	HX	Origin Stn	Check	Place of Origin	Time	Date
32	routine	hxe	wb4fa	17	west shelter	1210	23jun

GENERAL MESSAGE		
TO:	Lisa McMillan	
POSITION:	EOC Red Cross TN East	
FROM:	Sarah Hensley	
POSITION:	West Shelter Manager	
SUBJECT:	Additional clients	
DATE:	23 Jun	TIME: 1200
MESSAGE:		
45 CLIENTS ARRIVING 1500HRS. X NEED 45 ADDITIONAL MEALS COTS BLANKETS CARE KITS X REPLY WITH ETA		
SIGNATURE:	POSITION:	
Sarah Hensley	West Shelter Manager	
REPLY:		
REQUESTED ITEMS IN ROUTE x Expect arrival 1700hrs		
DATE: 23 Jun	TIME: 1430hrs	SIGNATURE/POSITION: Lisa McMillan Red Cross TN East

JOHNSON CITY-WASHINGTON COUNTY TN ARES ROUTINE TRAFFIC PROCEDURE

Here is your reply message ready to send:

No.	precedence	HX	Origin Stn	Check	Place of Origin	Time	Date
93	routine		NOKEZ	8	EOC	1430	23 Jun

GENERAL MESSAGE		
TO: Sarah Hensley		POSITION: West Shelter Manager
FROM: Lisa McMillan		POSITION: EOC Red Cross TN East
SUBJECT: Reply Additional clients MSG 32		DATE: 23 Jun TIME: 1430
MESSAGE:		
REQUESTED ITEMS IN ROUTE x Expect arrival 1700hrs		
SIGNATURE: Lisa McMillan		POSITION: EOC Red Cross TN East
REPLY:		
DATE:	TIME:	SIGNATURE/POSITION:

TRANSMITTING THE REPLY

Let's send the message. You list your traffic, "This is EOC with one routine for West Shelter, OVER".

The NECOS directed your traffic and you hear the receiving station reply, "West Shelter Ready to Copy, OVER"

You begin, REPLY FOLLOWS, Nine Three, Routine, November Zero Kilo Echo Zulu, Figures Eight, I SPELL Echo Oscar Charlie, FIGURES One Four Three Zero, FIGURES Two Three Juliet Uniform November.

(Unkey your mic to let receiving station catch up)

TO: Sarah, I SPELL Sierra Alpha Romeo Alpha Hotel, Sarah, Hensley, I SPELL Hotel Echo November Sierra Lima Echo Yankee, Hensley, West Shelter Manager.

(Unkey your mic)

FROM: Lisa, I SPELL Lima India Sierra Alpha Lisa, McMillan, I SPELL Mike Charlie Mike India Lima Lima Alpha November, McMillan, EOC, Red Cross TN East.

(Unkey your mic)

Reply Additional Clients I SPELL Mike Sierra Gulf Three Two, FIGURES Two Three Juliet Uniform November, FIGURES One Four Three Zero.

BREAK

Requested items in route XRAY Expect arrival FIGURES One Seven Zero Zero Hotel Romeo Sierra

BREAK, No More OVER

Note there are a couple of small changes in procedure in transmitting a reply message.

You alert the receiving station by starting with the phrase REPLY FOLLOWS.

The receiving station now is ready for the additional information in the Subject line of the message. The subject line of the original message was "Additional Clients" The subject line of the reply message is "REPLY Additional clients MSG32" This provides the receiving operator with the subject and message number of the original message.

When preparing the message for delivery to the West Shelter Manager, the receiving station attaches a copy of the original message, number 32, to the reply message. Delivering both messages to the West Shelter Manager provides clarification about the message.

Remember, personnel may be changing at locations on a rotating shift schedule. Sarah Hensley sent the request for supplies but her shift may have ended before the reply message arrives. Providing a copy of the original message provides the current shelter manager with the whole story. Good work. Now your new shelter clients will have a warm meal and a cot and blanket for the night!

FINAL COMMENTS

If you find you must send an ICS-213 message to another person not familiar with message handling, just instruct that person to write down each word, phrase or punctuation as you say it. You may have to include the various labels on the form to serve as landmarks for the receiving station as they fill in the ICS-213 form.

Instruct them to read back the message to ensure that they copied it accurately. After a few sentences, hopefully the receiving person will catch on.

Trained, experienced operators are a vital link in accurate, rapid communications. Some served agencies may have modified the ICS-213 form itself to include other bits of information. Listing the message check as an item on the form may facilitate radio operations by the radio operators trained in the use of the modified forms but will limit the effectiveness and cause confusion when attempting to use it with other agencies.

The served agency specifies all forms used during emergency operations. Our task as ARES communicators is to communicate information in support of the served agency accurately and rapidly.

If you find a served agency using a modified version of ICS-213 forms, make sure you can accurately and rapidly handle the unmodified forms in addition.

Do not rely on a printed form to transmit information in the basic form ICS-213 format. You should be able to send and receive the ICS-213 form starting with a blank sheet of paper.

Unfortunately, emergencies don't always come with a box of forms! Target your training to the worst possible conditions you can imagine. When the emergency hits, hope that conditions are that good. Take a page from the Boy Scouts and Be Prepared!

GENERAL MESSAGE		
TO:		POSITION:
FROM:		POSITION:
SUBJECT:	DATE:	TIME:
MESSAGE:		
SIGNATURE:		POSITION:
REPLY:		
DATE:	TIME:	SIGNATURE/POSITION:

ITU Phonetic Alphabet

The ITU phonetic alphabet is used to accurately transmit specific letters. All stations use the same phonetic alphabet to speed transmission and improve accuracy.

A Alfa	J Juliett	S Sierra
B Bravo	K Kilo	T Tango
C Charlie	L Lima	U Uniform
D Delta	M Mike	V Victor
E Echo	N November	W Whiskey
F Foxtrot	O Oscar	X X-ray
G Golf	P Papa	Y Yankee
H Hotel	Q Quebec	Z Zulu
I India	R Romeo	