

REACT Traffic Drill 2018-1
16 May 2018
Summary

OBJECTIVE: The Traffic Drill was conducted to:

(1) Train REACT Traffic System operators on the use of preformatted message templates - in this case the REACT Spot Report.

(2) Identify performance issues associated with the specific template.

HISTORY: This was the first Traffic Drill conducted. The impetus was comments received from one Team during Radio Relay International's second quarter hurricane reporting exercise that the RRI weather and situation reporting formats were unusable in an actual disaster because they required too much time to complete and because of the use of Amateur Radio radiogram format.

SCENARIO: The exercise was initiated by a combination of a notice in the weekly Traffic System Update of 16 May and an initiation message by radiogram to REACT Traffic Stations 111, 242, 321, 821, 822, and 921 on the scheduled Wednesday night Traffic Net. Stations were instructed to file a Spot report using the online template to report a disaster impact typical to their community.

OUTCOMES: Of 7 Traffic Stations, 4 responded to the exercise and 1 (Traffic 242) was excused. In addition, one REACT Team station responded from Los Angeles County REACT, apparently on behalf of a Traffic Station. Six Spot Reports were submitted. Thanks to Stan Latta, Rusty Hemenway, Angela Henry-Small, and Brian Van Meter for helping to make the drill successful.

All reports received included actionable information that would have been of use in understanding the impact of a disaster event, including the following topics:

- flooding blocking a road
- road traffic congestion
- developing brush fire
- evacuation in progress
- ongoing heavy rain
- extent of power outages
- contamination of potable water supply

Because time to complete the report was an obvious issue for one Team in the RRI exercise, to the point that the Team withdrew from the exercise, data was collected on the time required to complete the report:

- Traffic 241 - 2 minutes
- Traffic 321 - 2 minutes
- Traffic 822 (first) - 8 minutes - the delay resulted from having to reenter data when the template was rejected due to data missing in a required field.
- Traffic 822 (second) - 4 minutes
- Traffic 921 - 10 minutes - the delay resulted from determining what scenario information to report - operator commented that it would have been a much shorter time in an actual event as the report would have been about something she had observed.

The key descriptive statistical measures are that the range of time to complete the reports ranged from 2 to 10 minutes, with 8 and 10 minutes being outliers to be addressed by training and more detailed scenarios. The mean (average) time was 5.2 minutes and the median (center) time 4 minutes.

A number of issues were noted related to message composition:

(1) Basic proof reading - there were a good number of spelling errors and words and numbers run together. Messages coming in for eventual relay will be proofread by the operator transferring them to outgoing message forms. But this imposes a time penalty on the operator charged with that responsibility. All operators should proof and correct their work.

(2) Where the spot report goes - our Spot Reports are intended to come in from Teams in the field and then go to two places: (1) our internal incident managers, the Regional Directors and the incident management team, and (2) supported organizations. We will never make these reports to the general public or agencies with which we do not have an established working relationship.

(3) What is capitalized - when a message is transferred as a radiogram to an Amateur Radio traffic system, it will be transferred as all capitals. There are several reasons for this, but the primary ones are that indicating upper and lower case in voice or Morse code transmission significantly delays transmission. Messages internally, including those by template, are typically divided with the routing information, address, and signature in upper/lower case, and the text in all capitals. The intent is to highlight the

information that would actually be given to an addressee by telephone and to emphasize information that we need internally.

(4) Check - the check is the primary defense against garbles. Always carefully count the number of words and enter that number in the check. Remember that X (for a period) and DASH (for a -) count as words. We have a list of punctuation and how it is handled in the Traffic System Field Operations Guide. If in doubt or it is not obvious, spell it out as a word. For example, % is PERCENT.

(5) Words embedded in the form - we embed words and punctuation (and include instructions for counting them). In this case EXERCISE X and SPOT REPORT at the front and X EXERCISE at the end added 6 words to the message, leaving 19 for the text.

(6) Times - time zones should be combined with the time (1800PST versus 1800 PST). Together they are transmitted as a mixed group and count as 1 word. Separate they are transmitted as two groups and count as two words, taking more time to transmit. We have standardized on 3 letter time zones, CST for Central Standard Time and CDT for Central Daylight Time, as opposed to the use of CDST for Central Daylight Savings Time or CT for Central non-daylight savings Time.

ANALYSIS: Performance was of an overall standard that indicated that individuals with no previous experience with the form might make errors, but that the time required to prepare the template would not preclude its use during actual disasters to report useful data for the development of a common operating picture, especially by individuals trained and practiced in its use.

RECOMMENDATION: That the REACT Traffic System continue to hold Traffic Drills monthly, and that the general population of REACT Teams be invited to participate.

Walter Green
Chair, Training Committee
REACT International