

TACTICAL CALL SIGNS -- HOW, WHY and WHEN?

An EM basic studies training module)

Tactical call signs, when used properly by well-trained and practiced operators, can prevent confusion, save a great amount of time, and also aid in making a net or operation run smoothly and efficiently. When used improperly, or with poorly-trained and inexperienced operators, they will usually cause delays and confusion.

Typically, "tactical call signs" are used during disaster or other emergency situations to identify *a specific location or a function*. They are especially helpful when multiple operators are being rotated (in shifts) at stations such as a shelter, a net control station, or for a certain job/position (e.g. - logistics or "tech support") which may be a mobile unit.

Tactical call signs are also appropriate in regular (daily or weekly) public service, traffic and other nets. Properly used, they provide training, practice and experience. They are more commonly used on 'phone nets, but also can save time on CW nets. In the very early days of radio communication (all Morse) they were rarely needed since call signs often consisted of just two or three letters. Now that call signs are much longer, the use of tactical call signs make a lot of sense.

The use of tactical call signs can be very helpful if "mutual aid" has been invoked and operators with call signs that may be unfamiliar to "locals" arrive in an affected area. For example: A station identifying as "Riverdale EOC"* is immediately known as to where and what it is by everyone on the net or arriving in an area, regardless who is the operator on duty. Likewise, stations in the field who want to contact the "Riverdale EOC", can simply say: "Riverdale EOC", and not have to worry about remembering the FCC call sign of the operator.

ONE COMMON MISTAKE (often heard) is an operator identifying with the station's tactical call sign and then says his or her own call sign. Example: "Riverdale EOC KJ6ERK". *This is unnecessary and defeats the whole purpose.* Amateur operators only need to identify with their FCC-assigned call sign at the end of a transmission when they do not expect to transmit again within ten minutes and at the end of their shift assignment. (Ref. FCC part 97.119) ALSO, it is redundant and unnecessary to say, "for ID". Saying your call sign IS your "ID!"

GUIDELINES for using TACTICAL CALL SIGNS

1. In any NET, INCIDENT, OPERATION or EVENT, every location or station should have its own unique TACTICAL CALL SIGN.
2. TACTICAL CALL SIGNS should be descriptive such as a LOCATION, "Maple Street Shelter," a FUNCTION, "Team Leader," or both, "SEATTLE RELAY"
3. Don't use FCC call signs to identify a particular location or function since it is possible that an operator may be at one tactical location one day and at another the next day, or even the next hour! But be sure to use FCC-issued call signs when, and as required, by FCC Part 97.
4. REMEMBER: A TACTICAL CALL SIGN remains the same for a given station and does NOT change with the time, shift, day or with an operator change. It remains the same until the net or incident is over.

* It is not recommended that an emcomm station actually be located within earshot of the "war room" in an EOC. Ideally it is located near by and written messages are hand carried between the EOC and the radio station. Also, a message/bulletin board can be a VERY USEFUL TOOL! A land-line intercom is also very helpful to deliver and receive tactical voice messages. It is recommended that all **TYPE I ARCTS** keep a self-powered, closed circuit telephone system with enough "twisted-pair" (2 conductor wire), to reach between an EOC, command post, shelter, etc. and the emergency communications center (ECC) or other field emcomm station. Used field telephones are widely available from various military surplus supply houses.

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