

NET-105
TACTICAL CALLS

By KI5MA

The use of Tactical Calls at Public Service Events is becoming more and more common place and it is legal. When used properly the use of tactical calls can prevent confusion, can and does increase the efficiency and speed in identifying a specific function or person. They also eliminate confusion when working with other agencies that have no idea what an amateur radio call sign is or means. Improper use, however, can cause delays and create confusion.

During disaster or other emergency situations, "tactical call signs" are very useful to identify a specific location or a function. This is important when multiple operator are being rotated (in shifts) at shelters, net control, or for certain jobs or positions such as logistics, or tech support.

If "mutual aid" had been invoked the use of tactical call signs can be very helpful to operators who have come in to support the affected area and are not familiar with locations. For example: A station identifying as "HEC" or "Transtar" is immediately known as to where and what they are by everyone on the net or those arriving in an area, regardless of who is the operator on duty. Stations who want to contact the "HEC", can simply say: "HEC", and not have to worry about remembering the FCC call sign of the operator on duty.

For public service events: using "Rest Stop 1 from Net Control" is a lot easier and to the point than "K5XXX this is W4III." The assignment of tactical call should, if possible, relate to the amateurs function at the event. Tactical calls such as "Sag 1, Aid Station 4, Police 2, First Aid, Logistics" and so on provide a verbal "picture" of the function.

A common mistake made in the use of Tactical Call Signs is giving the tactical call followed by the operator's call sign. Example: "HEC W4III". This is not necessary and defeats the purpose. As required in Part 97.119(a) of the FCC Regulations, the amateur radio station must transmit its assigned call sign on its transmitting frequency at the end of each communication, and at least every 10 minutes during a communication. This is to clearly make sure the source of the transmission from that station is known to those receiving the transmission.

Most events have a mixture of amateurs that may not have worked together before and therefore are not recognizable by voice. In some cases, it would be prudent for the net control operator to poll the net using call signs at 10 minute intervals if the event activity permits. In any case it is the responsibility of the individual amateur to transmit his or her call sign as required by the FCC. In short: 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.

If you are working an event and have not heard traffic on the NET for some period of time, check your microphone PTT to make sure you are not creating a stuck microphone situation. If your radio has the capability, set the time out function so that a stuck microphone situation will automatically terminate after a specified time. Also, check your battery to make sure you radio is still operational.

Excessive time spent identifying your Tactical location causes unacceptably long transmissions!

The following is a poor example:

NCS: "Checkpoint Foxtrot, this is Net Control calling."

KD5ABC: "Roger, Roger, go ahead, Net Control. This is KD5ABC, that's Kilowatt Delta Five Alpha Bravo Charlie, Checkpoint Foxtrot, over."

NCS: "What's your report?"

KD5ABC: "KD5ABC, Checkpoint Foxtrot reports, nothing to report. This is KD5ABC, that's Kilowatt Delta Five Alpha Bravo Charlie, clear and monitoring, over and out."

NCS: "Thank You, Foxtrot, N5NCS"

It is better to say little or nothing at all if you have no report. Consider what it would be like trying to make an important transmission during KD5ABC's monologues?

Following is a good example:

NCS: "Checkpoint Foxtrot, this is Net Control."

KD5ABC: "Foxtrot here, Net, go ahead."

NCS: "What's your report?"

KD5ABC: "Nothing here, Net, all clear. KD5ABC"

NCS: "Thank You, Foxtrot, N5NCS"

The FCC regulations were observed in each of these examples, but one is much more efficient in terms of time taken vs. information passed?

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 for example "Bentab Hospital," a FUNCTION, a "Team Leader," or both.
3. Don't use FCC call signs to identify specific locations or functions. It is possible that an operator may be at one tactical location one day and at another the next day or the next hour.
4. REMEMBER: A TACTICAL CALL SIGN remains the same for a given station and does NOT change with the time, the shift, the day or with an operator change. It remains the same until the net or incident is over.