ARES of Champaign County, IL

Severe Weather Net Procedures

The purpose of the severe weather net is to collect information about the occurrence of severe weather in Champaign County for use by the National Weather Service in support of their warning responsibilities. Information may also be requested by the NWS to verify radar-indicated or public reports of severe weather. Champaign County is part of the Central Illinois Severe Weather Net. All information is routed through a single point of contact (SPOC) for each county. The Champaign County SPOC is Champaign County Emergency Management Agency (EMA).

ACTIVATION

All spotters should become familiar with the Hazardous Weather Outlook issued by the National Weather Service. This statement summarizes the potential for severe weather for the County Warning Area (CWA) and indicates if and when spotter activation may be needed. On potential severe weather days the ARES EC or other designated qualified member will assess the current weather situation and potential for severe weather. If the Hazardous Weather Outlook indicates that spotter activation may be necessary during the day, then an email message summarizing the current weather situation and the outlook should be sent to all Skywarn spotters (currently ARES and EMA trained spotters). The EC will also be in contact with the EMA director to determine when spotters may need to be deployed.

A Champaign County severe weather net will be activated on request from Champaign County EMA, the National Weather Service, or may be activated by ARES when severe weather threatens without a formal request from EMA. In general, the decision to begin a formal net and deploy spotters will be made by EMA in consultation with the ARES Emergency Coordinator (EC). ARES may begin a resource weather net when a watch is issued. The purpose of such net is to alert members to the potential weather situation and determine who is available for activation that day.

On days with a potential for severe weather, the EC will designate the Weather Net Control (WNC) operator as early in the day as possible.

ARES weather nets will be run from the Champaign County EOC. When a net is to be activated, the designated WNC should proceed to the EOC (enter at east door).

OPERATION

Net Frequency

The Champaign County Severe Weather will operate on the 444.100 (pl 162.2) repeater. Back channel traffic (spotter to spotter, non-spotter reports, etc) will operate on the 147.060 (pl 131.8) repeater. . If the 444.100 repeater is unavailable or becomes unavailable during a net, then the net will operate on the 147.060 repeater. When the net is operating on the 147.060 repeater, 146.760 will be used for back channel traffic.

Net Structure

Resource/Information Net

This net can activate at any time during the day with the potential for severe weather, and will always activate when a Tornado Watch is issued (if it has not already been activated). The purpose of this net is to provide periodic updates on the weather situation and to allow spotters to indicate their availability for possible activation. Any member may be designated as net control station for this net, preferably someone who is going to be able to periodically make a general announcement regarding spotter needs and record such information. This net will take place on the 444.100 repeater. Since this net will be primarily for information purposes, the repeater will be available for normal use in between net announcements. Upon activation of the Severe Weather Net, this net will move to the 147.060 repeater. Once the SWN has activated, the purpose of this net will be to handle any traffic not related to deployment of spotters and severe weather reports. The RNC should monitor traffic on the SWN so that he/she may answer any inquiries. Non-spotter traffic on the SWN will be directed to 147.060.

Duties of the Resource/Information Net Control (RNC)

The RNC will open the net and the direction of the EC using the supplied script and his/her own call sign. The RNC will be responsible for providing periodic updates of the current weather status (watch in effect, expected time of severe weather etc.) and taking check-ins for ARES members available for spotting duty that day. The RNC is responsible for accurately recording this information to provide to the WNC at any time before or when the SWN is activated.

Once the SWN is activated, the RNC responsibility on 147.060 is to monitor the SWN and handle any traffic on 147.060. Note that the RNC for this portion of the net may not be the same as for the resource portion (i.e. a new NCS may take over). The RNC will use his/her own call sign as net control.

Severe Weather Net

The Severe Weather Net is the tactical operations net. This net will commence operation with activation of the EOC, or may be initiated at the discretion of the EC if deems additional lead time may be needed.

Duties of the Weather Net Control (WNC)

The WNC will be responsible for directing spotters and collecting information. WNC will use the call sign WA9RES. It is highly recommended that two people be at the EOC, one to handle radio traffic and the other to log information and help keep track of what is going on.

When a **TORNADO WATCH** is issued, the EC will consult with the EMA Director to determine when the EOC may be activated. At this time the Resource Net Control should collect information on the availability of spotters to be later used in determining deployment.

The WNC will open the formal net using the Severe Weather Net Script (Appendix A). Stations should check in to this net ONLY if they are

1) Available for deployment as a spotter
2) Available to spot from their home location

Stations that cannot participate in spotting should NOT check in to the net. Stations that checked in during the Resource Net do not need to check in again unless their status has changed.

For safety reasons, ARES spotters will be deployed in teams of two whenever possible, especially in nighttime situations. It is up to the discretion of the WNC control as to whether or not a spotter will be deployed alone.

Once a formal net has been opened, WNC should provide an update of the current weather situation and run a check-in of all spotters that have checked in every 30 minutes. Once severe weather is in the area and traffic on the net increases, it may not be possible to run a check-in. Once severe weather moves out of the area or is no longer an immediate threat, a check-in should be done. The purpose of the check-ins is to be sure that all spotters are accounted for and to give spotters an opportunity to provide a routine update to WNC.

When a watch has expired, or once a decision has been made to close down the net because there is no longer a threat of severe weather as determined by the NWS or the EMA director/ARES EC, WNC will inform all spotters that they are released, and then run a check-in to receive acknowledgement from all spotters. The net may then be closed.

Use of Tactical Calls

Once a formal net has been opened tactical calls should be assigned and used. "Weather Net Control" should be used for the net control station. Spotters or spotter teams should be assigned designations in sequential order, i.e. Spotter 1, Spotter 2, etc. It should be noted on the log sheet which amateur radio calls sign(s) are associated with each tactical call. Even though tactical calls will be used to facilitate communication, remember that you must give your amateur radio call sign once every 10 minutes and at the end of your final transmission
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Handling Non-Spotter Traffic during a Net

On occasion ham operators monitoring the net will break in to either report something they are seeing or think they are seeing, or to request information. These operators should be reminded that a formal net is in progress. If they are reporting severe weather or damage, take their report. Those with questions should be directed to the Resource/Information Net on 147.060. We cannot rely on severe weather reports of untrained spotters (this is a "public report"), but all information should be recorded on the log. Reports of damage should especially be noted. Be sure to obtain the location and nature of the damage. Encourage the person reporting to report what they actually observer and not what they think has happened (e.g. "I can see numerous trees uprooted." vs. "Man, it looks like a tornado went through here.").

SPOTTER RESPONSIBILITIES

Storm spotters are the eyes of the NWS on the ground. The purpose of storm spotting is to collect information about the occurrence of severe weather in Champaign County for use by the National Weather Service in support of their warning responsibilities. Information may also be requested by the NWS to verify radar-indicated or public reports of severe weather. These Severe Weather Net procedures are designed to facilitate the efficient communication of information and spotter safety.

Spotters must attend NWS spotter training at least once every two years. Attendance each year is highly recommended.

Spotters must be familiar with NWS severe weather criteria and what to report and when.

Spotters must be familiar with and follow the established Severe Weather Net procedures.

Spotters must be familiar with the hazards associated with being out in potentially severe weather and how to avoid them.

DO NOT check in to the severe weather net if you cannot spot! When you check in, inform WNC as to:

a) Your location
b) If you are available for deployment, or will be spotting from your current location
c) When you will be available for deployment.
d) Whether or not you are equipped with a cell phone.
e) Make and model of your car if you are going to be deployed

Once you have checked in to the net, you are expected to monitor the net frequency for the duration of the net.

If you have to leave your radio for any length of time after you have checked-in to the net, inform WNC or check out of the net (you may later check back in).

If you checked in to the Resource/Information Net at an earlier time and then find out you cannot be available for deployment, you must update your status with the RNC or WNC.

Spotters are responsible for making sure they are adequately equipped for each spotting deployment, e.g. radio and charged batteries, ARES/EMA identification, county map, binoculars, rain gear, spotting reference materials, water and/or snacks for longer deployments, and any other items you feel are needed for your safety and comfort. Spotting deployments can often involve long periods of waiting followed by a frantic hour or two of activity.

Once you have been deployed to a spotting location, proceed to the designated location and on arrival, report such to WNC. Place your ARES mobile unit identification cards in your front and rear windows.

Remain at the designated location until otherwise directed by WNC.

Know where you are with respect to the nearest town or landmark (e.g. four miles north of Sidney).

Spotters must notify net control prior to any change in location, except in case of emergency or dangerous conditions. Check in with WNC to notify WNC of the change in location as soon as possible after your situation is secure.

Reporting Information

Spotters will contact net control with information only when there is significant weather to report, after changing location, or when leaving the net. Communications must be ***brief and concise***. Avoid the use of the word "tornado" when reporting severe weather unless you have a definite identification. Report what you observe, not what you think is happening. If you come across an area where there is damage, report the damage but do not speculate on what caused the damage unless you either witnessed it or receive a confirmed report as to the cause. "There are numerous trees down and some roofs blown off near the intersection of 4000 north and 3000 east", not "There are trees down and roofs off everywhere - it looks like a tornado went through here!" Report what you have observed and what you know. Think about what information you need to convey before you make your report, then make your report in a clear and concise manner.

Keep a written log of what you report, including the time, what you observed and reported, and any other pertinent information. This could come in useful after the fact in determining what actually occurred.