COLUMBIA BASIN NET

Additional Net Control Station Suggestions

Thanks to some great ideas from our NCS and Alternate NCS operators, Directors and Net Officers I have assembled the following suggestions for net operations during times of broken propagation, interference and the possible outage of a net control station during his/her running of a net. The intent of these suggestions is to enhance the reliability of keeping the net under control. Most of this information is common sense and I am noticing some of these procedures already being utilized.

In the perfect world, every NCS would be centrally located, possess a “hear-all” antenna and be running 1.5KW PEP. In our world we have control stations in the extreme NSEW boundaries of our area; most of us encounter un-expected QRN at times that blanks out the weaker stations; and when the band goes dead we know that 5KW would still not help. What will help is if we as communicators have contingency plans for times such as these.

Utilizing Relay Stations: Probably the most reliable means of getting check-ins from and confirmation to the others who are not hearing NCS. As a control station you should designate at least one if not two or three stations to act as your relay. I’ve noticed an increased lack of volunteering when a NCS asks for a relay during the reading of the preamble, yet during the roll-call I hear stations breaking in to relay a missed check-in. That’s enough for me. When I hear a station offering to relay in the station I could not hear I use that opportunity to ask the relay station to hang around and assist. As we have stated in previous discussions, a relay station that is very close to NCS isn’t the best solution geographically, but he/she may hear a lot better than I do so I will utilize them. Along these lines we need to enforce the requirement of any station offering a relay to use their call-sign as a means to break-in. I very much dis-like the un-professional method of just breaking in with other pro words or merely echoing the call of the missed station. I prefer to run my nets in an organized fashion; and by FCC regulations, every transmission should be I.D.’d. Use your relay stations but manage them too.

Know when to say WHEN: Each NCS should pay attention to the conditions that prevail and be able to recognize when he/she is having difficulty with a significant number of member stations hearing them. This situation may be more evident to potential relay stations than it is to the active NCS. Under these conditions any off-duty or alternate NCS should contact the NCS having difficulty and arrange to take over the net with mutual consent. If as NCS you recognize that band conditions are failing, you should attempt to contact an alternate station to continue the net. When passing off the Net to a relay be sure you are both clear on who is responsible for recording and reporting the check-ins. If NCS can hear the relay, NCS should continue to record the check-ins.

Pause for the Cause: Each of us has our own preferred style of calling the net, and this is okay, but the net runs smoother if you pause during the roll to ask for late/missed MEMBER stations in areas that have already been called, as well as asking for any relays thus far. This will help to ease the crush of late stations at the end of the roll. I prefer to hold off visitor stations until the very end so I can concentrate on the roster in front of me. I know that experienced net control stations know almost every call by city and name. I’m not there yet.

All Hands: Let’s get the word out to all hands on how to deal with a net control station who is not hearing a significant number of check-in stations. We know that popping in to say “I can’t hear net control” only adds to the confusion. We also know that some members do it just to get checked in because they are impatient and don’t want to wait their turn. Everybody knows the start time, everybody knows the daily rotation. Most of the time a station who does not hear net control can hear other more nearby stations. If I can’t hear NCS, I listen for a station that I can hear, wait for them to give their call and then I will follow with my call. This way, hopefully, a relay station will pick me up and relay me into the net. As NCS we need to be aware that if we are not being heard by some areas, we should be asking our relay to make a call in addition to our call for late or missed or even as we run the Net for those locations that we know we aren’t hearing that particular evening. As NCS, once the relay station has asked someone to wait their turn, we need to be sure they wait. Otherwise, our relays look foolish and the breaking station gets checked in out of turn thus encouraging them to break the Net again. When conditions are poor/bad, it would be a good idea to call for late or missed and ask for folks to give their calls phonetically. When calling the roster, we know who we are listening for but late or missed can be anyone.

Acting Relay Stations: When acting as relay station we need to help NCS keep the Net orderly. We can do this by telling those who break in with “I can’t hear Net Control” to please stand by till we either get to their city or till NCS calls for late or missed. Then we need to remember to call for those people when NCS gets to their city or assist NCS by echoing their call for late or missed when they make one.