

A Few Hints for Public Service Participants

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After working a number of public service activities, I started making notes on how to be a more effective communicator. Some of the suggestions come from observations; others are from my own experience.

Be concise - Each message should be brief and convey a single piece of information.

Dress sharp - You have to earn respect quickly. Many other volunteers and professionals are observing you and your actions.

Use plain language - Q signals, Morse code prosigns, and funny phonetics are unnecessary on voice channels and reduce message comprehension.

Push to talk

Wait to talk - All repeaters have delay. Some have more transmit delay than others, especially linked systems.

Talk slowly - Net control and other stations are either out in the open, or in a room full of noise.

Stay calm - Shouting into the mike and not keeping the radio antenna vertical decreases readability.

Think long - The repeater uses an 18 foot antenna from a better location. Use a minimum of a quarter wave antenna (at least 15 inches for two meters) on your hand held radio so you will be heard.

Lock it - Place your radio in lock mode so your assigned channel does not get changed.

Label it - Since situations and sometimes locations change rapidly, keeping track of your gear is easier with labels.

Volunteer early - Check the Public Service List, local section news or club nets, so organizers can make assignments and return event details to you.

Be patient - There will be a lot of waiting for events to happen. When the peak hits, both net control and field operators will get busy with multiple activities.

Be aware - of your situation. There may be hazards to be vigilant for while you are doing your communication tasks.

Make notes - You will forget the call of the ham you want to talk to later, or what broke on your radio (until the start of the next walk).

Wear good socks - You will be on your feet quite a bit, so take a tip from hikers about supportive footwear and good socks.

Eat early - Once the walkers/runners/cyclists start coming, the interruptions will be continuous.

Be flexible - Information is not always available when the event starts. You will be called on to do multiple tasks.

Be specific - If you have limitations on time, transportation, or personal capabilities, includes that in your sign up data. Do not wait until you receive your assignment, and then assignments have to be juggled.

Take it off - your belt. Leaving your HT next to your body will cause up to a 15dB loss in transmit power. Your two watts are reduced to only 1/16 of a watt.

Turn it down - The person you are shadowing does not need radio chatter blasting in their ear all day long. You should be a filter so the coordinator can do their job effectively.

Equipment will break - Have appropriate spares and tools you know how to use.

Make a list - Keep a short checklist of equipment needed for working these well controlled events. This will be a subset of the items in a full ARES go kit. Update it based on event experience.

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