

***MESSAGES – ICS 213***  
***GENERAL MESSAGE***



**A training course for REACT Teams and members**

This is the second course of a two course sequence on how to compose and transmit the two standard formal messages used in major emergencies and disasters. This text teaches the standard Incident Command System General Message (ICS 213), a message format used commonly in disaster response by government agencies. REACT members who work with emergency management agencies and communicators should be able to use ICS 213 messages. In addition the Traffic System uses this format as standard for longer text messages.

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## **INTRODUCTORY NOTE**

This course focuses on the ICS 213 General Message widely used for emergency communications. When originally designed, we intended to provide a single course that covered both the Radiogram and the ICS Form 213 Message. However, we realized that some of our members are quite familiar with the radiogram and that the amount of material to cover both it and the ICS 213 message would result in a much longer course text. In addition, how we are using the ICS 213 internally in REACT communications is evolving. The decision to offer two training courses provides a shorter course for each form, allows you to pick based on your needs, and simplifies updating as changes occur. The end result is that we have split the material into *109A Messages – The Radiogram* and *109B Messages – The ICS Form 213* as two training packages. Some sections of this text are shared by both courses.

### **I. WHAT IS A FORMAL MESSAGE?**

In emergency communications a formal message is a message composed in a standard written format that can be transmitted by one or more of a variety of media to provide information or taskings. The standard format provides interoperability between organizations and transmission media. The possible media include voice or digital radio transmission, e-mail, fax, pager, or telephone. Because the message is written, whether typed, handwritten, or composed electronically, it provides a record copy documenting not only the information or tasking, but also provides its routing and accountability for its transmission.

### **II. FORMAL MESSAGE REQUIREMENTS FOR EMERGENCY OPERATIONS**

Given that the purpose of a formal message is to communicate something of importance to the recipient in an emergency, it must meet certain basic communications requirements.

(1) It should contribute to management of the emergency. Standard functions that messages perform include (note that this list does not address warnings and instructions for the general public, a specifically governmental function):

**ALERTING** – alerting messages notify resources of the existence of a situation which may require response. They may raise an alert level in an organization that uses a numbered or color coded alert and readiness system. [example – “a tsunami is projected to impact Molokai at 1538”]

**WARNING** – warning messages notify resources that the impacts of a disaster or major emergency may directly or indirectly effect the specific resource. [example – “expect impacts of major disaster at your location at 2200” ...]

**AVAILABILITY REPORTING** – messages which report the availability of a resource for operations. [“High Country REACT 2 Type IV Communications Teams available 25 mile radius of home station 12 hour deployment”]

**BUILDING THE COMMON OPERATING PICTURE** – these messages provide information about the event in progress to allow the incident command post or emergency operations center to maintain an accurate understanding of the overall situation. [example – “Blackwater River flooding blocking highway 460 at Waverly”]

**ASSISTANCE or LOGISTICS REQUESTS** – messages which either request resources to meet a specific operational need or supplies and support capabilities to support continued operations. [example – “Request two additional Type IV communications team operators to augment for 24 hour operations”]

**TASKING** – messages which provide an operational assignment to a resource (the who, what, where, when, and how). [example – “Team 2 establish relay station on peak of Mount Charleston at 0730 GMRS Channel 3”]

**PROGRESS REPORTING** – reports by resources assigned to tasks of how much of the task is completed, typically including progress en route, when arrive on scene, major portions of the task complete, when released from task, when returned to the base of operations or to home station. [example – “Team 7 on scene Shady Grove Assisted Living”]

**ACCOUNTABILITY REPORTING** – accountability messages are a safety tool to ensure that all resources are accounted for and no one is missing. These are usually scheduled at a specific time interval. [example – “Team 2, Mount Charleston, 4 operators, operations normal”]

SITUATION REPORTING – a situation report, commonly termed a SITREP, is a brief summary of the location and operational condition of a resource, the task or tasks assigned and their state of completion, the resource personnel and equipment strength, other ongoing actions, any changes in the operational control of the resource, and the extent of impacts in the immediate area. SITREPs are either submitted on a schedule, such as the end of the operational period, or on request.

(2) It must be written in clear and unambiguous language. You do not want the recipient to have difficulty understanding what you mean. Acronyms should be used only if both the author and the recipient will understand them.

(3) It must be short. Twitter introduced the general public to short in the form of 140 character tweets, and was promptly adopted by many emergency management agencies as an emergency communications tool. Other emergency messaging standards range from 90 to 160 characters. Alphanumeric pagers achieve similar counts by limiting their small screens to a set number of lines of text. Short forces a focus on the core information for the message. Short is faster to compose, faster to transmit, faster to copy, and faster to read. And not only is it faster, but it is also more likely to be read and acted on.

(4) It must be specific and focused. Receiving a message that says “the water is rising and we are all going to die – send everything you have,” is not terribly useful. If my organization has a fire engine, a fire truck, a basic life support ambulance, a paramedic ambulance, a brush truck, a water tanker, a chief’s buggy, a heavy crash truck, a light crash truck, and a motorized skateboard, do you really need the skateboard? Or for that matter, since it is a flood, do you really need the water tanker? How much water is rising how far and where? How many have died and how many are at direct risk? In general requests for assistance have better outcomes if the request identifies what capability is needed to what extent (such as “we have 6 RED, 12 YELLOW, and 3 GREEN patients that need to be transported”), rather than for “everything you have” or even for “send me twelve ambulances.”

(5) Information provided must be as accurate as possible. In the first 24 to 48 hours of a disaster, there is a high level of inaccuracy in reports. Some of this is due to the difficulty of gathering data. Some of it is the difficult in keeping data up to date. Some of it is due to the natural friction of the event. Do not guess or speculate. Do not make up details to fill in for missing information. If something is an estimate, your message should clearly say so and indicate whose estimate it is.

(6) It must be compatible with the method of transmission. If the system handling the message has a standard format, messages in that format are going to be handled first.

(7) It is preferable if the message can be transferred between systems easily. For example, in the interoperability environment fostered by the National Incident Management System, an ICS 213 General Message can be received by the REACT traffic system watch officer, transferred to the REACT traffic system bulletin board, sent by e-mail, transferred to the amateur radio traffic system (with the use of additional routing information), and delivered to you by telephone, all without any change in basic format. In a major disaster, outages may mean that multiple systems must be used to get out of and into the disaster impact area. Interoperable formats make that possible.

(8) It must identify the sender. This is imperative for three reasons. First, if a message requests specific equipment, supplies, or personnel, someone has to meet the costs involved. In the absence of any other agreements that someone is the person who signs the message. Second, if the message tasks a resource, the resource needs to know that the person who sends the tasking is someone authorized to do so. Third you need to know who sent a message that reports impacts, needs, etc. because who the sender is may impact the credibility of the message. Finally, the addressee needs to know who sent the message so that he or she can direct a reply to the right person.

### **III. THE STANDARD TYPES**

There are three standard message formats in general use:

Radiogram. The radiogram is an American Radio Relay League, International Amateur Radio Union, and Radio Relay International standard for formal messages handled by amateur radio traffic systems. It is designed with a preamble that includes routing and accountability information, an address, the text, and a signature block. The radiogram requires some training in the correct formatting of its components, limits text to 25 words, and requires the use of telegraphic writing. It is an effective format for rapid transmission of messages on a variety of transmission mediums, and has stood the test of time, with literally millions of messages being passed nationally and internationally.

Incident Command System Form 213 Message. The ICS 213 message originated as a paper message form for internal use in an incident command post or an emergency operations center. It permits longer messages than appropriate for the Radiogram. However, it lacks some of the components that support handling by a radio communications system. As a component of the National Incident Management System, this is a national standard format, and it is commonly used by emergency management agencies.

Radio Relay International ICS Form 213 Message. Radio Relay International has grafted a standard preamble onto the ICS Form 213 to include the handling and accountability information normally found in a radiogram. Other amateur radio organizations have made similar modifications.

When we say standard, we mean that these message types are in routine use for emergency communications by civilian organizations. The Armed Services and their auxiliaries (Civil Air Patrol, the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary, and the State Defense Forces) generally use their own standard message formats. It is unlikely that our members will routinely encounter such messages.

#### **IV. TELEGRAPHIC WRITING**

In the early days of telecommunications, that standard way to get a message across the country was by telegraph. Telegraph communications were priced by the word – the longer the message, the more it cost. That put a premium on concise writing in which every word was chosen based on whether it contributed to meaning. From the telegraph company’s perspective a longer message took longer to transmit, which meant that it cost more to pass through the system. From the sender’s perspective, especially for businesses that sent a lot of telegrams, each word added to the cost of doing business.

Although radio messages are not priced by the word, in a major emergency or disaster longer messages require more time to transmit and are significantly more susceptible to garbles. Even worse, they are less likely to be read, understood, and acted on. In normal business, governmental, or military letter writing a premium is placed on not exceeding one page in length – busy decision makers simply will not read longer letters. In a busy emergency operations center, the core information in a one page message may be overlooked in the midst of the words.

All ICS messages should be written telegraphically, as concisely as possible. Some ICS 213 formats used by amateur radio emergency communications organizations limit the text to 50 words for messages that will be transmitted by voice. In a disaster, longer messages may be received from a supported agency, and will be transmitted if possible. Operators are encouraged to work with the author in the supported agency to edit the text to eliminate any wording that does not directly contribute to the critical meaning of the message. For example:

The original narrative: This is a message for today’s exercise. A large monkeypod tree has fallen across the intersection of King and Queen Streets, blocking the intersection so that vehicles cannot pass. We need a work crew to be sent with the necessary equipment to clear the tree from the intersection. The falling tree caused downed power lines in the area of the intersection. This message is for exercise purposes only.  
*Total 73 words (including periods).*

Still too long: This is an exercise message. Large monkeypod tree blocking intersection of King and Queen Streets. Send work crew to clear tree. Watch out for downed power lines in the area. End of exercise message.  
*Total 39 words (including periods).*

Edited:  
EXERCISE X TREE BLOCKING  
INTERSECTION KING AND QUEEN STREETS  
X SEND WORK CREW X  
DOWNED POWER LINES IN AREA  
X EXERCISE  
*Total 23 words (including XRAYs).*

Let’s look at how we got to the 23 word telegraphic message:

(1) “This is a message for today’s exercise.” “This is an Exercise Message.” The first version is not clear as to whether this is an administrative message about the exercise or an inject for the exercise. The second version is better, but “This is” contributes nothing to meaning. The word “message” belabors the obvious – it is sitting right there in front of you on a message form, so it probably is not a ham sandwich.

(2) “This message is for exercise purposes only.” “End of exercise message.” The first example does finally tell you that this is probably an exercise inject. The second is stating the obvious; you should not need the author to tell you that when the message stops, it is the end. For both the start and the end, “EXERCISE” conveys that this is an exercise.

(3) Now we look at what is critical in all this information. In any emergency incident you need to know

- WHAT has happened, what is the task to be performed
- WHERE the impact is
- WHO or what is needed to control the impact
- HAZARDS present
- WHEN did it happen, when do you need help

In this incident:

WHAT – a tree has fallen blocking the intersection. Unless there is something very unusual about the monkeypod tree, the public works or highway department work crews know what they need to bring to clear a downed tree. Similarly “blocking the intersection” means that vehicles can’t pass. If only part of the intersection is blocked, the message should have stipulated degree of blockage or direction of travel impacted.

WHERE – you can save a word by eliminating the “of” in “intersection of King and Queen Streets” with no loss of meaning.

WHO – “We need a work crew to be sent with the necessary equipment to clear the tree from the intersection” is packed with useless words. We will assume a work crew is a standard term for the type of resource needed. That the scene is requesting a work crew means that they need it to be sent. Telling a work crew to come “with the necessary equipment to clear the tree from the intersection” is unnecessary. The crew is being assigned to a tree blocking an intersection; any highway or public works supervisor will know that they should show up with the appropriate tools. This is like telling a REACT communications team to show up to perform communications tasks “and bring your radios with you.”

HAZARDS – hazard statements need to be clear and unmistakable. “The falling tree caused downed power lines in the area of the intersection.” “Watch out for

downed power lines in the area” is better, but you don’t need “watch out for ...” The area of the intersection is imprecise – is it bounded by the corners, does it extend up the streets, etc.? In an emergency response downed power lines are drilled into responders’ heads as a major hazard, detection of which is a life and death priority on scene. Better that the crew be watching for downed power lines throughout as the downed ones in the area of the intersection may not be the only ones.

WHEN – is not specified in the information provided, leaving the emergency management staff to prioritize the assignment of resources based on the importance of the road, the overall emphasis being placed on roadway clearance, and the priority of other taskings on highway or public works work crews.

## V. OTHER STANDARDS

**TIME.** Most of our lives happen in 12 hour time. You wake up at 6:00 AM and go to bed at 11 PM. Omit the “AM” and “PM” and this statement could either mean that you wake up in the morning and go to bed at night or that you wake at in the early evening and go to bed before noon (for example after working an 8-to-8 twelve hour shift in the emergency operations center).

But that is not the only chance for confusion – is noon 12 AM or 12 PM? What about midnight? Remember that official United States government use of these two switched in 2008. Today noon is 12 PM and midnight is 12 AM.

To avoid confusion, and to allow international communications in the many countries that do not use the 12 hour clock, we use the 24 hour clock. Times are expressed in 4 digits, for example 0600 for 6:00 AM and 2300 for 11:00 PM. Times up to 1:00 PM are converted by omitting the : and the two letter designation, thus 5:23 AM becomes 0523. Times of 1:00 PM and later are converted by omitting the : and the letter designator and adding 1200 to the number. Thus 3:05 PM becomes 1505. Note that many public safety agencies and emergency operations centers as well as the Armed Forces and their auxiliaries operate on 24 hour time.

**TIME ZONES.** Times in message preambles and texts may be local time for messages that will be handled in the same time zone. For messages that have to transit long distances and require action by a specific time Coordinated Universal Time is often used.

The situation is further confused during the period of daylight savings time. Daylight savings time is not universal use in the United States (with Hawaii and parts of Arizona not participating). In other nations daylight savings time (also called daylight time or summer time) may be applied in part of the country and typically does not start and end at the same dates as in the United States.

This means that any message may have three possible times depending on the time and place. Therefore, best practice is to identify which time you are using:

- UTC for Coordinated Universal Time. Coordinated Universal Time is essentially the same time as military ZULU or Z time or Greenwich Mean Time (GMT).
- Standard time for the time zone. Identified by an S in the time zone acronym.
- Daylight Savings Time for the time zone. Identified by a D in the time zone acronym.

Time Zone	Standard Time	UTC offset in hours	Daylight Savings Time	UTC offset in hours
Atlantic	AST or AT	4	ADT	3
Eastern	EST or ET	5	EDT	4
Central	CST or CT	6	CDT	5
Mountain	MST or MT	7	MDT	6
Pacific	PST or PT	8	PDT	7
Alaskan	AKST or AKT	9	AKDT	8
Hawaiian	HST or HT	10	HDT	9

To convert from time zone time to UTC add the offset to the current local time zone time. Thus 1600 Eastern Standard Time is 2100 UTC.  
 To convert from UTC to time zone time subtract the offset from UTC. Thus 2300 UTC is 1500 Alaska Daylight Time.

When you use UTC you will encounter situations where the UTC time when converted goes past the 24 hour format limit of 0001 to 2400. You have either gone forward or backward into a different UTC day. This means that you have to convert the date. If you are converting from your time zone to UTC this will be a step forward to the next day. If you are converting from UTC to your local time zone this will be a step backwards to the previous day. For example:

- You are in the Central time zone. Your local time is 2145 on 14 November (standard time). Add 6 hours to 2145 to get 2745. Convert 2745 to a 24 hour day by subtracting 2400. The result is 0345 on the next day. So in the Time filed block of the preamble you enter 0345UTC, in the Month block NOVEMBER (or NOV), in the day block 15.
- You are in the Atlantic time zone on 3 July (assuming that you use daylight savings time). You receive a message with at time and date of 0245 UTC on 3 July. Subtract 3 hours from 0245 to get -0015, and then subtract that number from 2400. The result is that the message was filed at 2345 Atlantic Daylight Savings Time on 2 July.

**CAPITALIZATION.** Radiogram messages are traditionally printed in all capitals. This originated with railroad and Western Union telegraph services as a way to reduce errors in reading handwritten message copies because of the difficulty of reading individual variants of cursive script. In addition, the Morse and other codes for continuous wave transmission did not distinguish between upper and lower case. You can expect that ICS 213 messages will be presented for transmission in all capitals or in upper and lower case. We encourage the use of all capitals to simplify transition of messages to the Amateur Radio traffic systems.

**PUNCTUATION.** Punctuation in radiograms uses old telegraphy practices; it is strictly limited, although recent changes have slightly expanded the list of punctuation that may be used. The following punctuation marks are in current use:

Voice Transmission	Written	Meaning
XRAY	X	Period or separator at the end of a sentence, phrase, etc. Not used at the end of the text as the end serves as the end. Counts as a word.
ROMEO	R	Decimal point in figure groups.
DOT	DOT	Period used in e-mail addresses. Counts as a word. Parts of the address before and after the DOT are separate words.
QUERRY	QUERRY	Question mark. Counts as a word.
ATSIGN (1)	ATSIGN	Symbol @ in e-mail addresses. Counts as a word – the address before and after the @ are separate words.

SLANT BAR (1) or SLASH (2)	/	The slash / used in URLs and to separate mixed groups.
DASH (2)	DASH	Dash to separate special number or mixed groups. Counts as a word.
Notes: (1) indicates used by Radio Relay International, (2) indicates used by National Traffic System		

The ICS 213 General Message is often written by individuals who are not trained in Amateur Radio procedures. As a result, normal English language punctuation is typically used. For voice transmission use the standard radiogram terms for punctuation. If other punctuation, not in common Amateur Radio use, is used, transmit the name of the punctuation mark, for example COMMA, COLON, etc.

## VI. THE BASIC ICS FORM 213

The General Message Form (ICS Form 213) is an all-purpose message form. This form is designed to be used in an emergency operations center or incident command post where a message is written and passed by runner to another staff member in the same facility. The person addressed then completes the reply section, and returns it to the originator. In effect it is an inter-office memo form.

The other use of the ICS 213 is as a radio message form. In the context of the incident command system where the response being managed may be large, but generally is within a jurisdiction or contiguous jurisdictions, it works. However, it is not designed for communications through a system where message tracking and accountability over long distances is an issue. As a result, there are various adaptations to the form, such as the Radio Relay International version of which is discussed in another section of this text.

A quick survey of ICS Forms 213 online shows that there is some variance in the forms themselves and in the instructions for completing them. One of the purposes of the Incident Command System is standardization. Therefore, REACT uses the ICS 213 as described in the *National Incident Management System Incident Command System ICS Forms Booklet FEMA 502-2* date September 2010, with one modification that is consistent with the approved process for modifying forms and that will not have any impact on copying a transmitted form.



## GENERAL MESSAGE

(ICS Form 213A adapted for use by REACT International)

<b>1. Incident Name:</b>		
<b>2. To (name/position):</b>		
<b>3. From (name/position):</b>		
<b>4. Subject:</b>		
<b>5. Date:</b>	<b>6. Time:</b>	<b>7.A. Message Number:</b>
<b>7.B. Text (added paragraphs 7.C. etc.)</b>		
<b>8. Approved by: Name:</b>		<b>Position/Title:</b>
<b>Signature:</b>		
<b>9. Reply:</b>		
<b>10. Replied by: Name:</b>		<b>Position/Title:</b>
<b>Signature:</b>	<b>Date/Time:</b>	

The REACT Form ICS 213 is correctly termed *ICS Form 213A adapted for use by REACT International*. The significant modification is the subdivision of the text block (numbered 7) into 7.A. for the message number and 7.B. for the text. The text can be further subdivided by paragraphs for clarity.

A note about message numbers – the message number, date and time, originator, and subject are all important in tracking messages in a major emergency. Depending on how information is managed in an Emergency Operations Center or Incident Command Post, messages may be recorded and filed by any of these identifiers. The ICS 213 does not normally have a block for message number. As a result a wide variety of solutions have been used to determine where a message number should be inserted. If you receive a message with a message number somewhere else, or no message number at all, accept it as it is.

The ICS 213A has 10 blocks which form a message and a reply to that message:

<b>Block Number</b>	<b>Block Title</b>	<b>Instructions</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Incident Name</b>	Enter the name assigned to the incident. This is an optional field, but its use in situations where multiple incidents are being worked is important to ensure that there is no misunderstanding of which event the message is applicable to.
<b>2</b>	<b>To (Name and Position)</b>	Enter the name and position of the addressee. Use at least the first initial and last name. For unified command incidents (and incidents involving multiple agencies) include the agency name.
<b>3</b>	<b>From (Name and Position)</b>	Enter the name and position of the originator of the message. Use at least the first initial and last name. For unified command incidents (and incidents involving multiple agencies) include the agency name.
<b>4</b>	<b>Subject</b>	Enter the subject of the message. This should be brief but distinctive enough to quickly identify the key issue, request, tasking, or information the message conveys.

<b>5</b>	<b>Date</b>	Enter the date in month/day/year format.
<b>6</b>	<b>Time</b>	Enter the time in 24 hour clock time of the message. If the message is going to cross time zones, enter the correct designator for the time zone.
<b>7</b>	<b>Message</b>	Enter the content of the message. Use normal punctuation, unless otherwise indicated. Be concise, write telegraphically, and make every word count.
<b>7.A</b>	<b>Message Number</b>	This is an adaptation of the ICS 213 to insert a message number field for message tracking. If it is used, do not use paragraph 7. If you are using a standard ICS 213 this is written in the Text block.
<b>7.B, 7.C, etc.</b>	<b>Text</b>	This is an adaptation of the ICS 213 to allow use of paragraphs to separate key elements of the message for easier reading and comprehension. If these are used do not use paragraph 7. If you are using a standard ICS 213 these are written in the Text block. For voice transmission we recommend that text not exceed 50 words. To make it easier to determine the word count, we recommend that words be printed 5 per line.
<b>8</b>	<b>Approved by:</b> Name Signature Position/Title	Enter the name and ICS assigned position of the individual approving the message. Ensure that the original form is signed by the approver.
<b>9</b>	<b>Reply</b>	The recipient enters a reply of the message and returns it to the originator.
<b>10</b>	<b>Replied by:</b> Name Position/Title Signature Date/Time	Enter the name and ICS assigned position of the individual replying to the message. Enter the date in month/day/year format and time in 24 hour clock format. Ensure that the original form is signed by the approver.

## VII. REPLIES

The ICS Form 213 was designed for use as an interoffice memo as a 3 page form, originally using carbon paper (although it could be copied on a copier or made as a carbonless form). The intent of a completed form is to provide a record of both the message and the reply message as the communication:

- pages 1, 2, and 3 have blocks 1 through 8 completed by the originator. Originator keeps page 1.
- originator sends pages 2 and 3 to the addressee.
- addressee completes the reply section on pages 2 and 3. Addressee keeps page 2.
- Page 3 is returned to the originator.

This process ensures that both the message originator and the addressee have a complete copy of the exchange.

This is not a problem if the transmission is by digital radio, e-mail, or fax. For digital transmission simply paste blocks 1 through 8 in a new e-mail or message form, add blocks 9 and 10, and send it back to the originator. In some softwares associated with digital radio, the software automatically inserts blocks 9 and 10 in the reply message when you compose a reply. For a faxed copy, fill out blocks 9 and 10 on the standard form and fax it back to the sender.

However, this makes passing messages by voice or alphanumeric pager cumbersome and time consuming as you transmit paragraphs 1 through 8 outbound and receive 1 through 10 inbound in reply. It may be simpler, faster, and more efficient to send a new message answering the original message. However, there is the danger that the reply as a new message will not be attached to the original. This creates the potential for confusion as to whether or not the original message was answered or as to what action the new message pertains. If you adopt this course of action the Text should contain a line to the effect of “this message replies to your number (insert message number) of (insert date/time).”

## VIII. HELPING THE AUTHOR WRITE THE MESSAGE

Three groups of people may author messages originated within the REACT Traffic System.

- REACT Typed Resource leaders in a major emergency or disaster response, REACT Team officers, REACT Regional Directors, and REACT International officers and Headquarters staff.
- Qualified REACT traffic handlers and radio operators for administrative and operational messages about communications operations.
- Staff of supported agencies and organizations using REACT communications to supplement existing, or to replace damaged, communications networks.

As a qualified traffic handler or radio operator you may be in a position where you assist one of the other two groups in composing or editing the text of a message. This can occur in several ways:

- You receive a message for transmission that appears to have errors in spelling, that is too long but appears to have unnecessary wording, or that appears to have some other problem. As a communicator there will be decisions, situation information, etc. that you will not know. However, as a communicator you will hear a significant amount of information about ongoing operations that will give you some degree of situation awareness. If you cannot understand the message or believe there is an error, immediately take the message back to the author and politely ask for a clarification. If there need to be corrections or changes, make them with the author, get them approved, and get the message on its way.
- A perplexed member of the incident staff sticks his head into the communications center and says words to the effect of “I have never written one of these before – does this look even vaguely correct?” The people who work on major emergencies and disasters in some cases are regulars who have multiple incidents and exercises worth of experience. However, it is not unusual for emergency operations center staffs to have this event as the only

experience for as much as 80% of the people in the room. In this case your job is to edit, with the individual with you, to make sure the text meets standards and says what the staff member needs it to.

- If you are a known and trusted member of the communications team, it may be that someone will ask you “this is what I want to say, can you write it and send it for me?” This may be flattering, but it is also dangerous. The staff member wants you to do their job, and you are not trained to do what they do. If you do write the message based on what she says she wants to say, make certain that you take the message back to the staff member and have them read it to confirm that what you have said is the desired message. Do not put their signature on the message until they have seen it.

## **IX. TRANSMITTING AND RECEIVING MESSAGES**

A message is not terribly valuable if it is not transmitted by the originating station, through intermediate stations, to reception by the addressee. That means that selecting the appropriate method of transmission is important. Options include:

(1) Voice Radio – voice transmission is conducted on the full range of Amateur frequencies in accordance with the band plan which allocates groups of frequencies to specific transmission modes. Voice transmission also occurs as the method of communication in the General Mobile Radio, Citizens Band, Family Radio, Multi-Use Radio, and Business Radio Services. Voice radio coverage extends for long distances in the High Frequencies in the Amateur Radio service and for line of sight in the high frequencies in Citizens Band, and the very high frequencies and above in Amateur Radio, GMRS, FRS, MURS, and Business Radio. In Amateur Radio and the General Mobile Radio Service range is extended by the use of repeaters and linked repeater systems.

(2) Digital Radio – there are a wide variety of ways that messages can be transmitted in a digital format, including by Morse Code, radio teletype, packet radio, Winlink, etc. Each mode of transmission has specific advantages and disadvantages. Advantages include:

- Higher speed throughput.

- Can transmit large volumes of data and the longer ICS 213 format message.
- An increased, but not truly secure, level of security given that anyone attempting to listen to the message must have compatible hardware and software and the training to use it.
- Long range communications are possible, in packet radio system through the interconnection of digipeaters.

However, there are limitations to digital communications:

- Increased equipment costs, especially for long distance communications.
- More complex suites of equipment requiring a higher level of expertise for their operation and introducing more points of potential failure.
- Increased needs for operator training and technical expertise. An Amateur Radio license is a requirement, with system specific training beyond that.
- More complicated transmission paths, with a higher potential for failure.
- The variety of different methods means that you must have a system and software compatible with the one in use for the event.

(3) Zello Nets – a Zello net, such as the REACT/Traffic System Net, is conducted in the same manner as a voice radio net. The Zello software used by each participant mimics the functions of a radio transceiver. However, because it is Internet based, users of any radio service can participate with users of any other radio service, making it a particularly useful interoperable system.

(4) E-Mail – the advantage of e-mail is reasonably secure transmission of information in a number of formats direct to the addressee at high speeds. No intermediate stations are required to relay information. The disadvantage is that e-mail depends on access to the Internet, sustained availability of electric power, and knowing the addressee's e-mail address. Transition from an e-mail environment to

radio messages requires a substantial change in operating practices, and constant practice if it is to be done smoothly.

(5) Alphanumeric two-way pager – in major cities alphanumeric two-way pager service is still available. It has significant advantages including increased range of coverage over cellular telephones, a separate transmission system that is not dependent on telephone circuits, and better penetration of buildings. Alphanumeric pagers have their own e-mail address, and messages can be directed to them from any location with Internet service. The disadvantages are that coverage in the United States is primarily limited to cities and that typing on the small keyboard is slow.

## **X. TRANSMITTING THE ICS 213 BY VOICE**

In this course we will be focused on the modes used in the REACT Traffic System. These include voice radio, use of the Zello REACT nets, and use of e-mail to pass formal radiogram messages. The two modes to transmit a message by voice, radio and Zello, are used in the same manner. This is because we use operations on Zello as training for radio communications.

Radiogram transmission in a net is controlled by the Net Control Station based on the precedence of the messages listed, with Emergency first, Priority second, and Routine third. However, ICS 213 General Messages do not have an integral precedence, making all messages theoretically equal. Net control may give priority to messages to or from a specific location or station or based on the message subject.

If you plan to transmit a message, have the message ready in the correct format at your operating position. Before the net starts, review the message form to make certain that you can easily read the complete message. When you check in to the net, check in with the traffic and the destination:

Traffic 241 one ICS 213 for Glendale California, over.

For organizational messages to REACT International or a Regional Director:

Traffic 241 one ICS 213 for REACT International Headquarters, over.

Traffic 241 one ICS 213 for Region 9 Director, over.

For organizational messages to Teams specify both Team and location:

Traffic 241 one ICS 213 for High Country REACT, Colorado Springs, Colorado, over.

If the message is for all stations on the net:

Traffic 241 one ICS 213 all stations on the Net, over.

Listen to the traffic flow and be ready to transmit your message when you are called. The exchange with Net Control, you, and the receiving station will be similar to this:

*Net Control:* Traffic 241 clear your message with Traffic 821, out

*You:* Traffic 821 this is Traffic 241 one ICS 213, over

*Traffic 821:* Traffic 241 pass your message, over

The same basic procedure works when passing a message outside of a net environment or in a free net:

*You:* Traffic 821, this is Traffic 241, with one ICS 213, over

*Traffic 821:* Traffic 241, this is Traffic 821, pass your message, over

Note that in the above exchanges, the Over and Out words are implied. In a busy traffic net with stations that are used to working together, they may be omitted by consensus of the operators. Similarly “this is” may be omitted.

The ICS 213 is a long message. When it has the typical Amateur Radio preamble data attached it takes even longer to transmit. Longer messages have a higher probability of garbles or dropped words. Longer messages may time out a repeater if regular breaks are not used. And longer messages are more fatiguing to transmit with a higher probability of loss of focus. That means that you must pay attention to how you pass them with voice transmissions. The following may help:

- Read the message before you transmit to make sure you know when you need groups, phonetic spelling, etc.

- Identify when you will break (see suggested flow of these below).
- Make sure you know how to pronounce all of the words.
- Adjust your speed of transmission to the speed at which the receiving station can copy.

Because of the various ways the ICS Form 213 General Message is being used, we recommend you provide more than the normal amount of information. For example, unless everyone involved is operating with the same format, it may be useful to:

- Identify which ICS 213 format you are using, by number, agency identification, etc. For example: *This is a FDA ICS 213RR.*
- Give both the Block Number and the Block Title followed by the information in that block. Note that this will significantly lengthen transmission time.

The location of breaks in transmission are not as well standardized as they are in the radiogram. We suggest that they follow:

- Block 3
- Block 6
- Block 7 – in long messages it may be necessary to also break in the middle of the text section
- Block 8 – if a reply is included
- If there is a long reply Break within Block 9
- Block 9

The following is an example of an ICS 213A (the adaptation for REACT use) voice message and reply with all elements and with a large number of words spelled out phonetically (on the left) with an explanation of the contents (on the right). In practice in an active net with regularly participating stations and traffic from the same places of origin or same destinations some of these spelled out words would not require spelling. However, if in doubt, any word that is a name or uncommon should be spelled phonetically.

First, on the next page is what an ICS 213A with the message and reply block printed ready for transmission. Note that, because each paragraph is short and counting the words in this case is easier if on one line, the lines are not blocked at 5 words.



**GENERAL MESSAGE**  
(ICS Form 213A adapted for use by REACT International)

<b>1. Incident Name:</b> COLORADO SNOWSTORM		
<b>2. To (name/position):</b> LINDA DUFFY COLORADO COUNCIL PRESIDENT		
<b>3. From (name/position):</b> WALTER GREEN HIGH COUNTRY REACT PRESIDENT		
<b>4. Subject:</b> TEAM SITREP		
<b>5. Date:</b> 7 FEBRUARY 2017	<b>6. Time:</b> 2105MST	<b>7.A. Message Number:</b> 14
<b>7.B. Text (added paragraphs 7.C. etc.)</b>  7B 2 MEMBERS DEPLOYED GREEN MOUNTAIN FALLS VHF RELAY  7C 24 HOUR COVERAGE CHANNEL 9 CENTRAL COLORADO SPRINGS  7D 1 MEMBER ON SHIFT AT COUNTY EOC  7E TOTAL 12 MEMBERS AVAILABLE		
<b>8. Approved by: Name:</b> WALTER GREEN <b>Position/Title:</b> HIGH COUNTRY REACT  <b>Signature:</b> <i>WALTER GREEN</i>		
<b>9. Reply:</b>  ADVISE IF YOU NEED ASSISTANCE FROM OTHER COLORADO TEAMS		
<b>10. Replied by: Name:</b> L DUFFY COUNCIL PRESIDENT <b>Signature:</b> <i>LINDA DUFFY</i>		<b>Position/Title:</b> COLORADO REACT  <b>Date/Time:</b> 7 FEBRUARY 2230MST

This message would be transmitted by voice as follows:

THIS IS AN ICS 213A MESSSAGE

This is a notation to indicate to the receiving station the particular ICS 213 format in use. It is not part of the message.

FIGURE ONE INCIDENT  
COLORADO SNOWSTORM

This is the first numbered block on the ICS 213. This is an optional block, but in general we recommend its use to simplify tracking and filing of messages for one incident.

FIGURE TWO TO LINDA I SPELL  
LIMA INDIA NOVEMBER DELTA  
ALPHA DUFFY I SPELL DELTA  
UNIFORM FOXTROT FOXTROT  
YANKEE COLORADO COUNCIL  
PRESIDENT

Unless the addressee is known to everyone who will handle the message, spell the name. There are many variations of the spelling of even simple names. If the message is going somewhere that will require several stations to handle it, or is going to a duty section in a large facility, supply an address in enough detail to get the message to the person.

FIGURE THREE FROM WALTER I  
SPELL WHISKEY ALPHA LIMA  
TANGO ECHO ROMEO GREEN I  
SPELL GOLF ROMEO ECHO ECHO  
NOVEMBER HIGH COUNTRY  
REACT PRESIDENT

If the message is going to require a reply or if it is from field units reporting to the EOC or ICP, an address may be required.

Break

FIGURE FOUR SUBJECT TEAM  
SITREP

Subjects should be short, but in enough detail to allow those handling the message to identify it.

FIGURE FIVE DATE FIGURE  
SEVEN FEBRUARY FIGURE  
GROUP TWO ZERO ONE SEVEN

Amateur radio practice is to not include the year. However, because disaster communications may be archived and

later retrieved in case of litigation, inclusion of the year may be important in establishing the legitimacy of the message.

FIGURE SIX TIME MIXED GROUP  
FIGURES TWO ONE ZERO FIVE  
MIKE SIERRA TANGO

Time is in 24 hour clock, usually local time. MIKE SIERRA TANGO identifies the time zone as Mountain Standard Time. This is a mixed group because it includes both numbers and letters.

Break

MIXED GROUP SEVEN ALPHA  
MESSAGE NUMBER FIGURE  
GROUP ONE FOUR

Identifying a message number can be a significant aid to locating a message in the message file of a communications center.

MIXED GROUP FIGURE SEVEN  
BRAVO FIGURE TWO MEMBERS  
DEPLOYED GREEN MOUNTAIN  
FALLS LETTER GROUP VICTOR  
HOTEL FOXTROT RELAY

The series of paragraphs 7B through 7E could be written as a single paragraph. However, writing them as separate paragraphs clearly communicates that each contains a distinct element of the situation report.

MIXED GROUP FIGURE SEVEN  
CHARLIE FIGURES GROUP TWO  
FOUR HOUR COVERAGE  
CHANNEL FIGURE NINE  
CENTRAL COLORADO SPRINGS

The mixed group SEVEN CHARLIE is the paragraph number in the block 7 text.

BREAK

MIXED GROUP FIGURE SEVEN  
DELTA FIGURE ONE MEMBER ON  
SHIFT AT COUNTY LETTER  
GROUP ECHO OSCAR CHARLIE

Depending on to whom the message is directed EOC might need to be written out as Emergency Operations Center.

MIXED GROUP FIGURE SEVEN  
ECHO TOTAL FIGURE GROUP  
ONE TWO MEMBERS AVAILABLE

Paragraphs 7B through 7E provide the key information the Council needs to answer emergency management questions about what the Team is doing in the snowstorm response.

BREAK

FIGURE EIGHT APPROVED BY  
WALTER GREEN HIGH COUNTRY  
REACT

The name in this block could have been spelled out. However, it has already been spelled phonetically in block 3, and it is a reasonable expectation that the operator will make the connection. If the name of the approver is not the same as that in the from block, the name should be spelled.

BREAK

FIGURE NINE REPLY ADVISE IF  
YOU NEED ASSISTANCE FROM  
OTHER COLORADO TEAMS

This is a short declarative instruction as a reply. The reply in other messages may be as long as or longer than the message itself.

BREAK

FIGURE GROUP ONE ZERO  
REPLIED BY LETTER LIMA  
DUFFY REACT COUNCIL  
PRESIDENT FIGURE SEVEN  
FEBRUARY MIXED GROUP  
FIGURES TWO TWO THREE ZERO  
MIKE SIERRA TANGO

This is the combined signature group of the individual making the reply along with the date and time of the reply.

END

The END statement indicates that this message is complete. It can be END AND NO MORE for the last message, or END AND (number) MORE to indicate that

## **XI. TRANSMITTING THE ICS 213 BY E-MAIL OR DIGITAL RADIO**

Because of the variability in how the ICS Form 213 General Message is being used, we recommend the use of a standard format in completing the message by e-mail or digital radio. Note that some state emergency management agencies have established ICS 213 templates for digital radio transmission, and these should be followed in communications with those agencies.

If you use the ICS 213 routinely and the agencies with which you communicate also routinely use the same version of the ICS 213, you can save time by simply providing the block numbers from the form, for example “1” or “7C,” and not including the titles. This saves 16 words worth of typing, approximately 30 seconds of typing if you type at a fairly typical 25-30 words per minute. Thirty seconds seems insignificant, but if you originate 50 messages in a day (a not atypical amount of work), it adds up to approximately 25 minutes, in other words to real time saved.

Transmission by alphanumeric pager should use the block number alone. Composing messages by alphanumeric pager is slow, and every extra letter makes it slower.

However, if there is any doubt at all that the person receiving the message is not fully conversant with the ICS 213, or your version of it, prepare the message using both block number and the title of the block, for example “4 Subject” or “7A Message Number.”

Note that in e-mail and digital transmissions, depending on the operating mode, it is common to have upper and lower case text and header information specific to the transmission software protocol. For example, the original message to the Council in the section above (not including the reply) might look like the following as an e-mail sent to a REACT council (assuming all members of the council were familiar with the ICS 213 format):

From: wgreen@react4817.org  
Sent: February 7, 2017 09:15pm  
To: lindaduffy@coloradoreact.org  
Subject: Team 4817 SITREP

This is an ICS 213A message.

1. Colorado Snowstorm
2. Linda Duffy Colorado REACT Council President
3. Walter Green High Country REACT President
4. Team SITREP
5. 7 February 2017
6. 2105MST
- 7.A. 14
- 7.B. 2 members deployed Green Mountain Falls VHF Relay
- 7.C. 24 hour coverage Channel 9 central Colorado Springs
- 7.D. 1 member on shift at county EOC
- 7.E. Total 12 members available
8. Walter Green High Country REACT

## **XII. PREFORMATTED ICS 213 MESSAGES**

The ICS 213 General Message form is well suited for preformatted messages. These are messages that are formatted for specific information. Rather than having to write out the text in detail, the message originator has only to put the specific information with the appropriate text paragraph numbers. Those readers with military communications experience will recognize these under such names as Formats, OPREPs, JINTACCS Voice Formats, Tabs, etc.

In addition to convenience in composing the message preformatted reports have three very important operational advantages. First, they always put the same information in the same place. The person writing the message knows the order in which to provide information, and the person receiving the message knows exactly where to look for it. Second, the format allows the writer to keep the text short, reducing transmission time. Third, the format lines provide a checklist to ensure that critical information is not forgotten under the stress of operations.

The first of these preformatted ICS 213s is the Team Availability Report, shown below. You will notice the long title – the National Incident Management System Incident Command System ICS Forms Booklet, FEMA 502-2, September 2010 establishes criteria for the modification of ICS forms. One of those criteria is that the new name of the form must identify the modifying organization and the purpose of the form.

Our preformatted forms are used in two ways. The first is as templates on REACT Warning Team 6247's website. Completing the template sends a message to REACT International with information needed for REACT response to a disaster. This includes information needed to coordinate with other national voluntary organizations, information for press releases, and data for emergency planning.

To complete a template go to <http://reactwarning.org/formatted-reports>, select the template you need, and follow the directions in the INSTRUCTIONS box on the right side of the page.

Templates for use by any Team in communicating with REACT International in a major emergency or disaster currently available at the time of writing this text include:

- ICS 231A – the General Message Form used by the staff of the Traffic System, REACT International officers, Regional Directors, and Teams to pass administrative and operational messages.
- ICS 213C – Team Availability Report used by Teams to report the availability of their resources for response either locally or regionally, statewide, or even across state boundaries in a disaster.
- ICS 213D – Mission Request form used by REACT International to assign missions requested by emergency management or supported organizations in a disaster.
- ICS 213E - Situation and Availability Report used by Teams to report the initial impact of an event and to maintain personnel and Team accountability in a disaster.
- ICS 213F – Ongoing Operations Report is a daily REACT wide SITREP used to provide Councils, Regions, and REACT International current information on operations in progress.

# ICS Form 213C Message Form adapted for REACT International use as Team Availability Report

1. Incident Name

3. From (Team Name)

3.A. Team Number

5. Date Message Written (any format)

6. Time Message Written (24 hour local time, include your time zone)

Standard Activation Levels: RELEASED - Team members and the Team are not on alert for any event. ACTIVATION LEVEL 4 - STANDBY - an awareness level during which the Teams alert their members, review plans, and check equipment and supplies. ACTIVATION LEVEL 3 - READINESS - Teams start to determine availability and schedules - a Standby Net is initiated - REACT Traffic System is activated for daytime coverage. ACTIVATION LEVEL 2 - LIMITED ACTIVATION - Base Station Teams are activated and a schedule established to maintain coverage as needed - deployable Communications Teams should be ready to deploy - Traffic System is on 18 hour coverage. ACTIVATION LEVEL 1- FULL ACTIVATION - Emergency communications are fully operational - Communications Teams are deployed as needed. NON-OPERATIONAL - Team is unable to perform emergency communications mission.

7.A. Your Team Current Alert Status (select the button that most accurately represents your response to this disaster)

7.A. Released

7.A. Activation Level 4 - Standby

- 7.A. Activation Level 3 - Readiness
- 7.A. Activation Level 2 - Limited Response
- 7.A. Activation Level 1 - Full Response
- 7.A. Non-operational

7.B. Total Team members available to do disaster response work from their base stations, deployed in the local area, or deployed outside your local area.

7.C. Number of Type IV Teams (1 team leader 1 radio operator) you could deploy to work on site within 25 miles of your Team's location on a 12 hour shift.

7.D. How many of your Type IV Teams (1 team leader 1 radio operator) in 7.C. are available to deploy more than 25 miles from your local area for 72 hours?

7.E. Other information (including impacts on your Team and assistance that you need)

8. Name of Team member making this report

8.A. E-mail of person making report

8.B. Phone number of member making this report.

If you do not have Internet access, use the current edition of the REACT Traffic System MESSAGE FORMATS guide. This provides the key block numbers, titles, and standard content for each preformatted message in current use. To compose a

radio message, telephone message, or fax you can write down the message in the format in the guide – you do not even need an ICS 213 message form.

### **XIII. THE RADIO RELAY INTERNATIONAL VERSION**

Radio Relay International has put some thought into how to handle ICS 213 messages in an Amateur Radio environment. The result is a Radiogram ICS-213 Message, the RRI Form 1703 ICS. This form comes in two variants, one for digital transmission with the text typed in lines of 5 or 10 words to facilitate counting for the check, the other for voice transmission with a grid for 50 words inserted in the text block.

At the top of the form is the Network Management Data – effectively the preamble of the radiogram message. This provides routing, point of contact, and the temporal relationship of this message to others. It includes:

- Number
- Precedence
- Handling Instructions (HX)
- Check
- Place of Origin
- Time of Origin
- Date of Origin

The next area down is the Address Component with the complete address, including ZIP code, unless it is certain that the receiving station can directly contact the addressee:

- To (name)
- Position (title and agency)
- City, State, and Zip
- Telephone and optional e-mail

Below the address is the Signature Block which fills the same function as in the standard radiogram and adds the ICS 213 subject line:

## Radiogram ICS-213 Message

Number	Precedence	HX	Station of Origin	Check	Place of Origin	Time of Origin	Date of Origin
To (Name)				Position (Title & Agency)			
City, State, Zip							
Telephone and optional e-mail							
From (Name)				Position (Title and Agency)			
Subject				Agency Local Time (conversion from UTC)			
<i>Please be brief – Use only the period for punctuation – Assume message may be delivered in all capitals</i>							
Message Routing (Received from call sign/DTG)				Message Routing (Transmitted to call sign/DTG)			

RRI Form 1703 ICS  
2017-5-1

- From (Name)
- Position (Title and Agency)
- Subject
- Agency Local Time (conversion from UTC)

The text block is similar to that of a standard radiogram. The significant change from the normal ICS 213 usage is that it should be in all capitals to indicate that the test is case insensitive and to facilitate interoperability.

Finally, the message ends with routing data to record from whom the message was received and when and to whom the message is sent and when.

## **XIV. ISSUES TO WATCH OUT FOR**

### **ROUTING**

If you are sending a message directly to another station within radio contact, routing is not a concern. Where it becomes important is when the message has to go through another intermediate station. The ICS 213 is not designed for routing through multiple hops. Nor is it designed for prioritization of communications in a pile of other messages. One solution to this is to attach a standard radiogram preamble to the message form and add address information to Block 2, the To block.

A second solution is to use Amateur Radio to send the form digitally if you know the call sign of the destination station for Winlink or the identification of intermediate nodes for packet radio. The obvious problem is how to pass the traffic if you do not know these call signs or node identifications. The answer depends on having digital operators available who can provide that information.

### **FINDING THINGS**

In a busy communications center and in a busy staff position in an Emergency Operations Center tracking messages received and sent is every bit as important as sending the messages and receiving them. Under the stress of the event and with information arriving by computer updates within the staff, telephone calls, faxes, radio messages, e-mails, briefings, people passing voice messages through two other

people, etc., the potential for a message to be lost, overlooked, not passed on to the next shift, etc. is high.

There are at least seven ways to store message for retrieval: (1) toss it in an in-box stack and hope (the electronic equivalent is to simply leave it in the e-mail or WINLINK queue and hope you can find it by digging through the list), (2) file by who sent it, (3) file by who it is sent to, (4) file by subject matter, (5) file by urgency, (6) file by time, or (7) file by number. All of these, except for number (1) have merit. The problem is that you don't know how the person on the other end is going to file things.

That means that if you are referencing a message you sent or that was sent to you, give as full an identification as possible. For example, "your message 134, precedence EMERGENCY, 27 February, 2210 EST, subject emergency evacuation of Shady Rest Memory Care Facility," should be able to be located regardless of how it is filed. Of course, if you know the other person's system, omit everything that is not needed. Generally number, date, and time should be sufficient.

## **REPLIES**

We have already addressed the reply function on the ICS 213. It is worth stressing again the importance of making sure that the reply is associated with the original message. A quickly written short reply may make no sense at all without the context of the original message. Replies should be transmitted as the complete ICS 213 if at all possible. If replies are written without blocks 1 through 8, the text of the reply (block 9) should identify whose message, the message number (if there is one), and the date and time of filing. The reply should be printed and stapled to the original message, and delivered to the addressee as a package. Having unconnected replies floating around is a recipe for disaster.

## **WORD COUNTS**

The standard ICS 213 is not designed to facilitate a check function. It lacks the neat boxes found on the radiogram or the RRI version of the form. There are workarounds:

- (1) The check number can be inserted in a preamble grafted onto the form or in one of the form's standard blocks.
- (2) The text in the text box can be typed or printed in 5 word or 10 word lines to make it easier to count.
- (3) Transmission of the text can be broken down sentence by sentence with the sending station reading the sentence, and the receiving station reading it back to confirm a correct copy.

None of these are completely satisfactory. They will increase transmission time and have the potential to confuse an operator who does not understand what you are doing. However, they will reduce the chance of a garbled message.

### **THERE SURE ARE A LOT OF WORDS HERE**

Although the ICS Form 213 allows longer (in the Radio Relay International voice version) or long messages (in the standard format), the fact that there is more space does not mean you should fill it. It takes more time to write a long message, and more time to read it. If the difference is 5 more minutes to write it and 1 more minute to read it, and 1 more minute to enter the gist of the message in the incident log, 100 longer messages (perhaps a single shift in a moderately busy emergency operations center) will require at least 700 more minutes of work, generating 11+ hours of delay in the system.

In addition, experience suggests that the problem in an emergency operations center or an incident command post may be, at some times, too much information, not too little. Long messages suffer from what one very competent fire captain and one equally capable emergency medical services lieutenant staffing the fire/rescue desk in an emergency operations center once said in front of an evaluator in an exercise: "There sure are a lot of words here." It was not intended as a compliment. In fact it indicated their confusion, and ultimately they referred the message to their Chief of Department for resolution. Too many words can lead to a message being only partly read or put aside, to be taken up later, a later that never comes. Clear, concise, to the point communication of the key information is important regardless of the type of radio message used.