

Formal Traffic

What is it & why should I know about it?

What is formal traffic?

Formal traffic is detailed information passed between 2 stations. The traffic is passed in a predetermined written form and contains detailed information on the originator and the destination as well as the message itself. In addition the urgency or precedence of the message is included. All formal traffic is based on the National Traffic System (NTS) of written messages. This is a system that has been adopted world-wide to ensure accuracy and uniformity between all groups handling formal traffic.

Why should I know about formal traffic?

Amateur radio operators pride themselves on being part of a “pool” of trained communicators available in an emergency. Unfortunately, the first thing often required during an on-air emergency is a short course in **Formal Message Handling**. This wastes valuable time and resources.

Consequently, trained operators are needed!

An example of informal traffic:

The following is an example of informal traffic we’ve all handled on a local repeater. Yes you have likely handled and/or passed informal traffic.

VA7XZY: VA7WSW this is VA7XZY

VA7WSW: VA7XZY this is VA7WSW, How you doing Jim?

VA7XZY: Doing fine Bill. Could you have Mary give me a phone call please?

VA7WSW: Sure will! Take care, VA7WSW clear.

VA7XZY: Thanks, VA7XZY clear.

Obviously Bill and Jim know each other well. There was no question as to who Mary was and the telephone number was not even necessary.

The consequences of mishandling this message are likely minimal. Jim might be waiting a while for a phone call or Mary might not get the message and be upset with Bill.

So how does formal traffic differ?

- In the case of formal traffic the two parties on the radio may not know each other!
- The text of the message usually is prepared by a third party who is likely NOT an amateur radio operator.
- The context of the message may not make sense to the amateur radio operator.
- The amateur radio operator passing the traffic may not be the amateur radio operator receiving the response.
- To ensure that traffic is passed correctly a paper trail is mandatory and hence formal traffic requires that a written message is sent and a written message is received.

An example of formal traffic:

At this point we won't get into the details of the radiogram form that may well be the subject of a traffic handling course near you. However virtually all forms will have the following:

- A unique message number.
- A precedence rating
- A place of origin
- A station of origin
- A date and time

The above items (and perhaps other information) will be put on the form by YOU or another amateur.

The Third party will add the following to the message:

- An indication of the message urgency (Precedence).
- Name, address and phone number of the person to whom the message is sent.
- The Third party's name, title and address
- The message Text
- Signature on the message

The amateur sending or receiving the message will add to the form such information as:

- Signature and or call sign
- Date and time of transmission or receipt, and
- Method of transmission (e.g. telephone, 2 metres, 20 metres etc...)

Why written traffic is essential!

In an emergency situation you may be asked to pass information that is foreign to you. For example, it may include such things as the **Number** of casualties or part numbers for equipment.

It may include references to unfamiliar **people** or **locations**.

In many cases lives and/or dollars may depend on the complete accuracy of the data transmitted and received.

This is an example of a radiogram used to handle NTS formal written traffic

AMATEUR RADIO – RADIOGRAM

NUMBER	PRECEDENCE R, W, P, E	HX	STATION OF ORIGIN	CHECK	PLACE OF ORIGIN	TIME FILED	DATE
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TO:
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PHONE # (.....)

NOTES

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SIGNATURE

RECEIVED FROM SENT TO