

Eyes to the Skies & Ears on the Radios

Summertime in Florida makes for some interesting weather & radio traffic

Well, it's getting to be that time again in Florida where the warm weather turns hot and humid, and the rainy season arrives. While this isn't anything new for Floridians it's a good time to review our weather spotting procedures; and etiquette when working a weather spotting net or providing an NCO with a coherent weather report.

How many times are you listening to a Skywarn Net or weather net and you get the following radio traffic, "*Net control this is N9GKO*" net control replies dutifully: "*N9GKO this is net control go ahead with your traffic*", the station then responds with this insightful report, "*Net control this is N9GKO it's getting darker out and there's light rain with a little wind, back to you*" what purpose has this piece of radio traffic provided anyone? OK I'll go out on a limb here and say that we now know N9GKO's radio is actually working. That is about all. (*disclaimer here we are using N9GKO as an example call sign and not claiming this station is operating incorrectly in reality*).

The point here is that there seems to be a group of operators across the bands that, when reporting weather conditions, they report conditions that are meaningless to everyone and at the same time ties up the frequency for real communications. We check into our radio clubs' weekly nets and all "practice for emergency communication" but when there is an actual real purpose it all goes out the window.

So, when making weather or spotter reports try and follow some basic guidelines that will ensure your report will be more useful to other operators and the national weather service. Here are some tips that I believe would lead to a better weather net and spotting report.

1. When you turn on your radio and start listening to the frequency if there isn't radio traffic going on at this time check in with the NCO or whoever is "riding herd" of the net. Let them know who you are (call sign) where you are (location) how long will you be on station (time you are going to be there) and skill level of the spotter (Skywarn trained, spotter ID, FAA trained, Law Enforcement, etc.) so this way the NCO knows what kind of eyeballs he has out there looking at things. This can be a huge help when or if something comes your way.
2. When making a weather report "*Just the facts ma'am*" like Sergeant Joe Friday... Tell the NCO what you feel is important for others to know about. If it is severe weather, then make it about severe weather not that there is some drizzle that started 5 minutes ago. For example, include any or all of the following:
 - a. Let them know location of the spot.
 - b. Let them know the time of the spot.

- c. Let them know if there is damage or whatever details that would be helpful. Report exact wind if possible, otherwise report damage action from wind (branches down, trees uprooted etc. are all recognized specific wind levels)
 - d. Let them know if you need any services, Fire / LE / utilities etc.
3. Do all the above as calmly as if you are checking into the most routine boring Thursday night net with 10 people you talk to all day. There is no reason to impart urgency or alarm with your voice, do it with the information you have to share. The NCO will understand the severity immediately.

That's about all you need to report to the NCO. Anything more is just noise. If it is truly a severe outbreak there will be other stations that need to *phone in* their reports too, so clear the frequency.

If you're curious about what qualifies as severe weather take the time now and review your weather spotting Skywarn lessons and learn what makes weather severe, yes there are parameters that make it severe or not. This would be a good time to brush up on the various cloud formations and what makes a "Tornado" or "Funnel Cloud" also what is large hail and damaging winds. Take time to learn about the Beaufort wind scales so you can quickly identify the type, direction, and approximate level of winds.

It is better to prepare now and know what frequency's you should be monitoring and get them programmed into your radios now than when a storm is breathing down your neck. Funny how your memory does not work so well when under a little stress.

One last thing, listen first, talk second, when there is a net in progress this is 100% not be the time for you to ask for a "radio check" or "am I making the repeater", know your gear, if you've taken care of it and checked it regularly it will be fine. How many times have we heard radio checks right in the middle of a spotter net, and if you really really need to get a radio check switch to a repeater that is not providing priority traffic.

If you want more information on Skywarn and weather spotting or want to become a trained weather spotter follow the link below that will take you to the Skywarn web site and information spotter training.

<https://www.weather.gov/tbw/skywarn>

73's.

Jack N9GKO