

National Traffic System (NTS)

The National Traffic System (NTS) is designed to meet two principal objectives: 1) rapid movement of traffic from origin to destination, and 2) training amateur operators to handle written traffic and participate in directed nets. NTS operates daily and consists of four different net levels—Area, Region, Section, and Local. The four levels operate in an orderly time sequence to make a definite flow pattern for traffic from origin to destination.

Local Nets

Local nets are those covering small areas such as a community, city, county or metropolitan area, not a complete ARRL section. They usually operate at VHF (typically 2-meter FM) at times and on days most convenient to their members. Some are designated as emergency (ARES) nets that do not specialize in traffic handling. Local nets are intended mainly for local delivery of traffic. Some NTS local nets operate on a daily basis, just as do other nets of the system, to provide outlets for locally originated traffic. They also route the incoming traffic as closely as possible to its actual destination before delivery—a matter of practice in a procedure that might be required in an emergency. Most local nets and even some section nets in smaller sections are using repeaters to excellent effect. Average coverage on VHF can be extended tenfold or more using a strategically located repeater, and this can achieve a local coverage area wide enough to encompass many of the smaller sections.

Section Nets

Coverage of the section may be accomplished by individual stations reporting in, by representatives of NTS local nets, or both. The section may have more than one net (a CW net, a VHF net and an SSB net, for example). Section nets are administered by an appointed Section Traffic Manager (STM) or designated Net Managers (NMs). The purpose of the section net is to handle traffic within the section and distribute traffic coming to the section from higher NTS levels. The section net also puts traffic bound for destinations outside the section in the hands of the person who is designated to report into the next-higher NTS level (the region level). A high level of participation by amateurs within the section is desirable to carry out all of these responsibilities.

Operation During Disasters

When a disaster situation arises, NTS is capable of expanding its cyclic operation into complete or partial operation as needed. ECs in disaster areas determine the communications needs and make decisions regarding the disposition of local communications facilities, in coordination with agencies to be served. The SEC, after conferring with the affected DEC and ECs, makes his recommendations to the Section Traffic Manager and/or NTS net managers at section and/or region levels. The decision and resulting action to alert the NTS region management may be performed by any combination of these officials, depending upon the urgency of the situation. While the EC is, in effect, the manager of ARES nets operating at local levels, and therefore makes decisions regarding their activation, managers of NTS nets at local, section, region and area levels are directly responsible for activation of their nets in a disaster situation. They activate their nets at the behest of and on the recommendation of ARES or NTS officials at lower levels.