

ACS Area 2 Message Handling Forms

1 Introduction

One of our primary ACS tasks is to quickly and accurately send customer messages from one location to another over our voice nets. To do this we need message handling forms that are simple to use and yet contains all of the necessary information to get messages to their intended destinations. The message forms shown in Figures 1 and 2 achieve that objective for messages that we can expect to handle in Area 2.

The most important aspect of our Area 2 message traffic is that it is predominately “single hop”. That is, a message is usually sent from the message originator directly to the recipient without intermediate stops or relays along the way. For example, if City EOC needs to send a message to East County Sheriff’s Station (ECSS), the message is transmitted directly from the City EOC radio operator to the radio operator at ECSS. This is very different from cross country health and welfare message traffic handled by the ARRL National Traffic System (NTS). In order to get an NTS message from California to New York, the message generally must pass through many relay stations along the way. For example, a message originating in Thousand Oaks may be first transmitted to Sacramento, then to Reno NV, then to Salt Lake City,, finally arriving at its destination in Buffalo NY. The NTS message forms are necessarily complex in order to successfully route and accurately transmit messages through these many hops. In contrast, our Area 2 message forms are very simple.

An Area 2 message is typically handled by 6 people. They are:

- **Message Originator:** Our customer at an EOC will use a Message Out form (Figure 1) to compose the message he or she wants us to send.
- **Sending Site Message Handler:** One of our message handlers will accept the completed form, ensure that it is properly filled out and readable, resolve any problems with the message author, and take the message to one of our radio operators.
- **Sending Site Radio Operator:** The radio operator transmits the message to the radio operator at the destination site
- **Receiving Site Radio Operator:** The radio operator at the destination site receives the message and copies it onto a Message In form (Figure 2).
- **Receiving Site Message Handler:** Our message handler at the destination site delivers the message to the addressed recipient.
- **Message Recipient:** The recipient receives the message.

There are several key aspects to this process.

First, the job of our radio operators is to listen to all of the radio traffic, sending and receiving messages as needed. They can not deliver messages that they have received or accept messages from our customers to send. If they did, the distraction and time away from the radio could cause them to miss critical messages.

Our message handlers are the interface between our customers and radio operators. Our message handlers will get to know our customers well, and our customers will know them. When a customer has a message to send, they know who to give it to. When a message comes in, our message handlers know who to deliver the message to.

This personal relationship between our message handlers and our customers is extremely important in crises situations when everyone is under stress.

Customers compose the messages that they want us to send using the Message Out form. It is easier for customers to write out their messages on Message Out forms than to dictate messages to us. If necessary, we can explain to them how to use the message forms when they come on their shifts. They learn quickly.

The radio operators are the ones who fill out the Message In forms. Each message that a radio operator receives is copied into a Message In form.

Our ACS operating procedures require us to have copies of all customer message traffic that we send and receive. To do this, our message forms are printed on two part paper, a white top sheet and a yellow second sheet.

For Message Out forms (those written by our customers), the white top sheet goes to our radio operator and our customer keeps the yellow copy. The white top sheet is usually easier to read and thus must go to radio operator so that he can accurately transmit the message. Once transmitted, the radio operator will place the Message Out form into a sent message box.

For Message In forms, the white top sheet goes to our customer. Our radio operator places the yellow copy in his message received box.

2 Message Out Form

The customer enters the Time, Date, and circles the message priority (Emergency, High, Routine, Low) at the top of the form. The person the message is being sent to is entered in the "To: Name" field along with the organization the person belongs to (To: Organization), and the location of the person (To: Location). The person composing the message enters his or her name in the "From: Name" field along with their organization (From: Organization), and location (From: Location). The body of the message is entered into the Message section of the form. The last line is completed by our message handler

The Organization and Location fields require some explanation. Organization is the organization that the person belong to, such as, Thousand Oaks Finance. Location is their current location which may be different from what you would think. For example, at the time the message is composed and sent, the Thousand Oaks Finance person may actually be located at the East County Sheriffs Station EOC, not the City EOC as you would expect.

The customer hands off the message to one of our message handlers when the form is completed. The message handler checks over the form for completeness, ensuring that it is readable, and works with the customer to make any appropriate changes, perhaps changing the message priority. The message handler enters his or her ACS number in the Message Handler ID field, and enters the time and date in the appropriate fields at the bottom of the form. The message handler separates the form, giving the yellow copy to the customer and delivering the white top sheet to our radio operator for transmission. The radio operator transmits the contents of the message form to the destination site.

MESSAGE OUT

	Time:	Date:	Priority: Emergency, High, Routine, Low
	Name	Organization	Location
To			
From			
Message:			
Message Handler ID	Time:	Date:	

Figure 1

The Time and Date entered by the message handler at the bottom of the Message Out form constitutes the time and date that ACS took responsibility for sending the message. To minimize transmission time, and avoid confusion, only the **time and date entered by the message handler** is transmitted. The **time and date entered by the customer** is not sent. The customer’s time and date information is available on the original copy of the Message Out form saved at the transmitting site should it be needed. It rarely is.

Every message that we send and receive must be uniquely identified. Trying to control message sequence numbers from all of our sites across multiple shift changes is extremely difficult if not out right impossible. In addition to a sequence number, each message must identify the message handler involved in generation of the message so that if there is a question about it, we know who to ask.

