

SITUATION REPORTS

Tom Cox VE6TOX

Alberta Emergency Management Agency

Emergency Management Training Officer

For amateur radio, a situation report is a concise, accurate summary of the incident. It tells multiple stories; the incident, the response, the desired public reaction, the desired ARES reaction. It covers safety, direction of the response, procedures, and the immediate prognosis for the incident. That's a lot of information!

The longer the situation report, the less room there is for any other type of traffic. Emergency traffic must come first, but keeping everyone on the same page and going in the same direction makes a situation report close to priority traffic.

How can we keep all this short, but provide all this information? A standardized format can assist.

DISPLAY AND BROADCAST

It isn't enough to create the situation report. It must be displayed for others at the station to see. A whiteboard is a great tool for creating the message, especially in a fast-changing environment. It can easily create the format and changes can be made quickly.

WHO WHAT WHEN WHERE WHY AND HOW

A good news story covers all of the key questions of who, what, when, where, why and how? Use those as the framework.

You need to cover four or more stories with the 5W + H. A common mistake is to put the response details into the incident. Craft the response as if there is no response at all and the incident will continue to develop. Try to keep every W down to one or two words!

1. What is the incident?

- Who – Who (in a wide sense or regional sense) is affected
- What – What is the incident
- When – When did it start. This may not be required if it is NOW!
- Where – Where is the incident located
- Why – Why is this dangerous. Why may also refer to why did this incident occur. Usually “unknown” or not stated. May be important if further incidents are likely; ie bushfire on an extremely hot, windy day.
- How – How did the incident occur. Usually not necessary

2. What is the response?

- Who – Who is responding – police, emergency services, power company
- What – What is the response – responding, arriving, deploying, assessing, on-scene
- When – This may not be required if it is NOW!
- Where – Where is the response located, usually not stated as it is the incident site.
- Why – Why did the response occur. Usually “responding to 911 reports” or “due to the risk of injuries or property damage.
- How – How are they responding. Big items like EOC activated, Incident Command established, evacuation ordered, public warnings issued.

3. What is the desired public action?

- Who – Who needs to act. Residents within two blocks
- What – What is the desired action. Evacuation, prepare to evacuate, shelter-in-place.
- When – This may not be required if it is NOW!
- Where – Where do they evacuate to, shelter-in-place
- Why – Can be omitted if already in the incident description, can be stated
- How – Specific details. Usually quite long as to all other parts of the description.

4. What is the ARES response

- Who – Usually “ARES members”
- What – What do they do. Stand by, clear their schedule, respond to _____.
- When – “Only report when ready to leave on three minutes notice.” Shift length.
- Where – What frequency and Where do they respond to (if not already done)
- Why – At the request of the emergency officials, in case of escalation.
- How – Clear your work, family, pet commitments, have a grab&go bag, etc.
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5. Other details (each are critical)

- What are the objectives of the response or of ARES in supporting the response. What do we want all ARES members to do or assist doing.
- Confirmation we have spares, in case the situation gets worse. No spares means you have zero organizational flexibility and zero emergency capacity.
- Safety issues
- Quick prognosis - Summary of the situation getting worse (dig down deep, everyone!) or the situation is getting better (the response is working). NEVER, ever say the situation is the same. If an incident is the same, then it is no longer getting worse and the response efforts are working.