NEMCo WinLink Exercise Details

When: May 3 – May 10

Frequency: 145.050

NEMCo RACES is in the process of transitioning from Airmail to WinLink for digital messaging between our EOCs. Airmail has served NEMCo (and ESCA before) for a couple of decades. WinLink is now the digital program of choice for most Emergency Communications groups. During these "stay-at-home" times, learning the intricacies of WinLink can be a valuable expenditure of time for our members.

The 5th Saturday Drill (May 30, 2020) is currently in the planning stages. It is very likely that this drill will be conducted remotely with NEMCo members staying at home rather than being deployed to the EOCs and field operations. Both voice and digital messaging will be integral components of the drill.

The Outreach Committee (with the effort led by Doug) designed the WinLink exercise that ran from April 26-May 3. This exercise has been extended for an additional week. We encourage all NEMCo members and hams from around the area to participate in this event in preparation of the upcoming drill.

WinLink Exercise 2020-5-2   Rev E   145.050 MHz
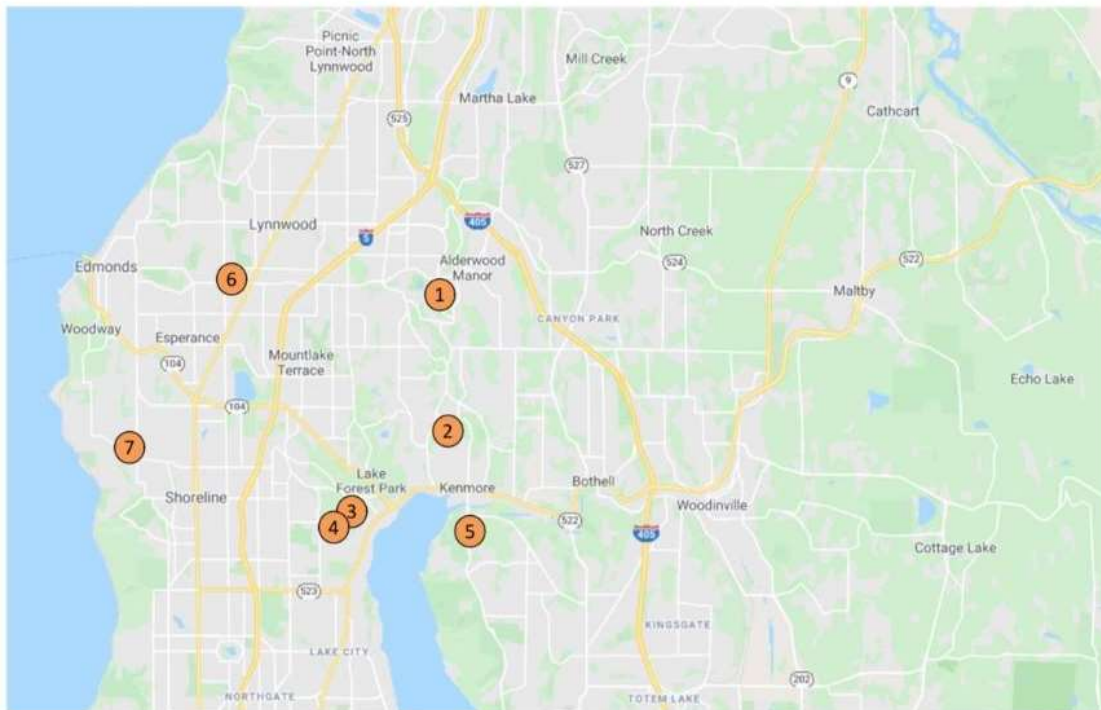
(1) K7RMZ Jon, P2P Hours 24/7
(1) K7RMZ-15 Digipeater Hours 24/7
(2) KF7RQ Doug, P2P hours 24/7
(3) N7JTO Kent, P2P hours 24/7
(4) KI7YQR John C, P2P Hours 2200 - 0600
(5) N7OYN Randy, P2P Hours: 1400-2359
(6) K7LDB-3 Digipeater Hours 24/7
(7) W7AUX-10 Shoreline Gateway Hours 24/7

NEMCo
www.northshoreEMC.com

We have five stations set-up around the NEMCo area to receive and answer messages from participating stations. The Amateur Call Signs of these stations, their operating times and general location are shown in the map above. These stations will receive, and answer messages sent to them via any WinLink protocol (Telnet, Peer-to-Peer (P2P), Gateway).

We encourage hams to use any form of WinLink communications. Connection via Telnet is a certain method for everyone. An initial contact with the station(s) of your choice by Telnet is encouraged. This way we know who is trying to connect. Issues encountered during the exercise can be sent and help found for those issues.

The map now reflects an additional digipeater located at Edmonds Swedish Hospital (K7LDB-3) and also the Shoreline gateway (W7AUX-10).

We have three primary goals for this exercise.

A) **Familiarity with WinLink and using Telnet**. Configuring the program (RMS Express) on your computer and getting messages both sent and received through the internet (Telnet) emphasizes the basics of using WinLink. Anyone with a computer can use Telnet WinLink. No radio is required. It is essentially analogous to using email - but with a couple of other necessary details. Configuring WinLink on your computer is best done following a step-by-step process that can be found in a comprehensive Communications Academy presentation. Do not get discouraged by these long presentations … Scott Curie covers many aspects of how to get WinLink working. Please review these two supporting documents which are available on the NEMCo website (with links provided on the NEMCo Amateur Radio page):

- Page 13 of Scott's 2018 Comm Academy presentation covers most of the aspects of getting your computer setup.
    - **S-09 WinLink Express Install and Config Overview Part 1 of 2, Scott Currie**
- His 2019 presentation covers many other aspects of WinLink installation and interfacing various pieces of equipment.
    - **S-04-WinLink_Global Radio E-mail Introduction_Currie**

B) **Peer-to-Peer communications** is the primary digital means for messaging between EOCs. Getting your computer configured and interfacing your radio to the computer can be a major project. The Outreach Committee had hoped to provide a hands-on workshop for this, but during these times that is not possible. We hope to assist hams with this by connecting them to someone who has similar equipment and who can assist remotely.

C) **Using WinLink Form Templates** is an important aspect of WinLink. Form templates are important as we will be using them to send information from our EOCs. These could be the basic message form (ICS213) or resource requests or any number of other standard communication forms. The beauty of using WinLink form templates is that the EOC Manager can fill out a nicely formatted blank form, with that information then entered or copied into the WinLink (RMS Express) program - looking cleanly formatted before being sent on. The send process ONLY sends the text and not the template format (which saves time). Once the receiving station receives the message, the text is placed back in the form template, and the format is restored. Seeing this process work and understanding how to get the formatted message out of the program is integral to message work at the EOCs. We will encourage all participants to get the ICS213 standard message form template, fill it out and send that on to a receiving station.

Configuration Recommendations before you start:

1) WinLink has a configuration setting that automatically sends WinLink Messages IF your computer is connected to the internet. This configuration can be found here:

Settings>Message Notifications and Forwarding>Automatic Message Forwarding>Forward via CMS if internet is available, otherwise put in Outbox

We recommend you uncheck this configuration setting. Otherwise if you create a WinLink Message and then want to send it via an RMS Gateway, - for example W7AUX-10 - the moment you put the message in the Outbox it will be automatically sent via Telnet. We are not emphasizing using an RMS Gateway in this exercise, but it can be a sudden surprise when your message is sent before you have had a chance to think about sending it to a Gateway.

2) Add all five participating stations to your Contacts. This just makes creating messages easier.

3) Accept all WinLink updates of the program and any new form updates. Do this every time it asks you to do so. This way all participating stations will be current and using the same version of form templates.

4) Find the ICS213 standard message form.

Open a message to any of the five participating stations. In the message text box find "Select Template." Under "Standard Templates (version xxxx)", find ICS USA Forms and select "ICS213.txt." This will open the standard message form which you can then fill out. You can save your completed form and reuse it by just changing the message text and other aspects as needed.

5) Remember when you are creating a message and before you post the message to the Outbox, you must select - at the "Send As" drop down box - either:

- WinLink Message—these will go via Telnet or an RMS Gateway

- or

- Peer-to-Peer Message—these will go ONLY by radio to radio, P2P

Once the communication protocol has been selected and the message posted to the Outbox, it can be changed by reopening the message and choosing another protocol.

How this NEMCo Training Event will work:

Select at least one participating station from the list of five. Send them a message via Telnet indicating you are participating in the event. At some point, the receiving station will reply to your message using Telnet. You have to connect to WinLink via Telnet to pick up their reply. Keep checking if you don't see it the first time, as they may be slow at replying.

Send a P2P message to that same station. If you connect, that message will go into the receiving station's Inbox. They will reply to your message and it will be placed in their Outbox. You will have to connect to that station, later in the day, via a P2P session during their operating hours – or even the next day - to pick up their reply. If you fail to connect to that station due to line-of-sight or other issues, choose another station in the participant list and start again with a Telnet to them. Sending a Telnet message to the original station saying you cannot connect via P2P would also be good as they may be able to assist with any issues. Continue the process until you have successfully connected to a station and exchanged both Telnet and P2P messages.

Once you are successfully connecting to a receiving station, try sending them a completed ICS213 message form. They will either reply to that message or send you a new ICS213 message. Keep this up for as long as you like or try another participating station. Fill in the text of the message with some details so the receiving station will have some context of the communication attempt. Just putting "test" in every message will potentially confuse both parties. "Test 1, Date, radio power, antenna" are examples of information that may assist in clarity of messaging between the two operators.

Here is a tip on how to reply using the ICS213 message form.

- Close the ICS213 form. Open the original message, but not the form. Hit "reply." The form opens back up. The browser may ask you if you want to activate the form. Say "yes." Fill in the reply box and the other fields at the bottom. Push the "Submit" button at the bottom of the form. Now you are back in the original reply WinLink message. Remember to make it a P2P message. There should be an attachment to the message. If not, then something went wrong. Post to outbox. Send to P2P station.

Using a digipeater. Jon's station also allows digipeating as does the station at Swedish Hospital. This means you can attempt to send a message to a participating station you may not actually be able to directly connect to due to line-of-sight issues. Once you open a P2P session to send to a station you can change the "Connection Type" to "Digipeater" and enter Jon's digipeater station call of K7RMZ-15 in the "Via" box. The message then is sent to the desired receiving station through Jon's station. Practice using a digipeating station even if you can connect directly. Terrain issues in both Lake Forest Park and Kenmore can be challenging, so understanding how to use a digipeater could greatly facilitate communications between stations without line-of-sight.

The Outreach Committee hopes everyone has fun and learns a few new operating procedures using WinLink. The receiving stations will try to help with issues encountered during the exercise and to find a ham that can assist you remotely.

Good Luck and have fun.

For screenshots and other helpful operating tips for using WinLink please review these two other supporting documents on the NEMCo website (with links provided on the NEMCo Amateur Radio page):

How to Use WinLink Forms--Rev C

How to WinLink Peer to Peer--Rev B