

## ***HANDLING TRAFFIC with ERRONEOUS INFORMATION***

During a recent on-the-air RADIOGRAM practice session, a participant asked what to do if you receive a message (either for relay or delivery) that contains what you believe to be erroneous information. Should you forward or deliver the message exactly as you received it? Or, should you send a "service the message" back to the originating station and/or the originator for clarification?

This question comes up from time-to-time. It is one of those questions that many wouldn't touch with the proverbial "ten-foot-pole!" Regular Emergency Management reader's know that we tend to venture where others may fear to tread...and so...with great trepidation, we'll try to address this very real issue.

First and foremost, we will re-state this commandment:

Traffic handlers must **NEVER, EVER**, make any change(s) to a message and forward it. (This includes the preamble, address, text and signature.)

There are, however, exceptions to every "rule," and if you receive a message that you believe contains a serious and/or critical error, you then must make a judgment call as to whether to forward the message (exactly as you received it), or return the message to the station of origin as a service message for confirmation and/or correction. :

1) For **routine** (R) inconsequential messages, the best rule of thumb is to simply forward it.

2) However, for **welfare** (W), **priority** (P), and **EMERGENCY** traffic, you are convinced that an inaccurate message could affect the safety of human life or property, you may decide to (for safety's sake) "service it back" (using same precedence as the original message) to make sure that it is correct (or not). Depending upon the situation, it might be better to take the time to clarify the message than to forward and/or deliver a "mixed-up" or unclear message that could have disastrous consequences. **ACCURACY TRUMPS SPEED!**

Consider this hypothetical situation:

Suppose you receive a message for relay that involves a distress or some other request for assistance. (A ship dead in the water, lost or stranded vehicle in the desert, etc.) The TEXT includes a latitude and longitude. The message (as received) places the POSN (position) at a southern latitude. However, you have

recent knowledge that the vessel (or stranded party) is at a northern latitude.

Or, a message may include a location on a Forest Service road and the relay operator (you) knows the road number stated is incorrect or non-existent.

You believe that if either message is delivered with the incorrect latitude, or other location coordinates, a rescue party will be directed, to the wrong location, possibly hundreds of miles off course.

Of course, you could hold the traffic and originate a service message back to the originator to confirm north or south latitude. But this would only delay the traffic. Imagine a court trial where an operator has to defend delaying a message or relaying what he/she knew was incorrect.

We put the question to Ed "FB" Trump, AL7N, WRRL 6 who is our resident authority on traffic handling. This is what he says:

"First of all, the **CONTENT** of any message is the province of only two parties: The originator, and the recipient.

"The **ONLY** place any question should **EVER** be asked about the **CONTENT** of a message is when it is presented by the originator for transmission at the originating station, and then only to the extent required to make sure the message text is **EXACTLY** as the originator wishes it to read.

"This is especially crucial in the case of **EMERGENCY, PRIORITY** or **WELFARE** message traffic. This important "joint" responsibility of **BOTH** the originator and the station of origin to make sure the message text is accurate and as it should be sent is too often overlooked or neglected by originating stations and/or their counterpersons.

"Outside of something obviously illegal, which should never be allowed to get to the radio operator for transmission in the first place, the message should then be transmitted as originated.

"Any station/operator subsequently handling the message is obliged to transmit it or relay it **EXACTLY** as written by the originator. It may not "make sense". It doesn't have to.

"Same goes for a message that might appear to be "in error". Relaying or delivering operators **MUST NOT** judge messages on their content. The only safe course is to relay it expeditiously and accurately...period.

"However, things can and will get screwed up and it **IS** possible that something in

the message text obviously in error is discovered by some other station "closer to" the destination. **That type of situation would best be handled, in my opinion, by attaching an "op note" to the message AFTER the signature to "flag" the possible error.**

**EXAMPLES:**

**OP NOTE** LATITUDE POSSIBLY SHOULD BE NORTH INSTEAD OF SOUTH

or,

**OP NOTE** FS ROAD 279 DOES NOT EXIST POSSIBLY SHUD BE FS 2779

"Therefore, I would relay/deliver the message "as received" as long as I was sure I had made no error in receiving it from the distant station, and **append the "op note" to address the perceived error after the message signature.**

"It is indeed a judgment call, and one of the situations when the "rule" must be "bent" a little.

"The message originator and the first station to put any message on a circuit both have a responsibility to prevent this sort of thing at the outset. If due diligence is given at origination, the possibility that something would look improper or incorrect down the line is minimized."