

Help File - The Amateur Radio Welfare Radiogram Text Creator

The Winlink Express Amateur Radio Welfare Message Text Creator is a special purpose adaptation of the general purpose Amateur Radio Radiogram Text Creator. It is fully compliant with the amateur radio radiogram format but includes some special features and excludes items that are not necessary. It was developed as a cooperative effort between the Seattle Emergency Communication Hubs (<http://seattleemergencyhubs.org/>), Seattle Auxiliary Communication Service (ACS) (<https://www.seattleacs.org/>), Radio Relay International (radiorelay.org) and the Winlink Development Team (winlink.org). The Northwest Washington American Red Cross provided additional input with regard to the short message texts.

This Text Creator template is intended for brief outbound Welfare/Safe and Well communications from a person in a disaster area to family/loved ones. There are a couple of differences from the standard general purpose Radiogram Text Creator template:

- The preamble is simplified. Precedence is restricted to Welfare and Test Welfare, there are no handling instructions and UTC is autofilled as the time of origination.
- There is a list of suggested short messages that may be inserted into the message text. These are, in some part, derived from the American Red Cross Safe & Well list of short texts. In the drop down list, clicking on any item will transfer the text into the message pane;. More than one standard text can be added as well as free text but the check should still stay within 25 groups.

Some Guidelines

Be sure to inform the party that is sending the message that this is a one way communication with no guarantee of delivery. It's a volunteer service by amateur radio operators and a best effort is made in every case.

The best practice is to get as much information about the addressee as possible. The traffic network is forgiving to some extent and the delivering operator can do some additional research if possible and practical.

For example, the sending party may not know the postal (zip) code of the addressee. There are off-line look up lists that may be downloaded free or for a nominal fee. At the minimum, the state is required and the first two digits of the zip code followed by 000, e.g. 04000. This will get the message to the correct state.

Also, if the phone number or email address is known, the message may be delivered from any location that has one or both of those services available.

Delivery methods include telephone, email and USPS letter. If the recipient can receive text messages, that should be indicated in the OP NOTE.

For handling a volume of messages, it is recommended to use the off-line version of this template. The off-line tool runs in a browser and outputs a file in the correct format for the radio operator to send.

For raw input information, there is a Multi-Client Worksheet. that may be found in Winlink Express. It is located in the same folder as this Radiogram template. Just click on "Multi Client Work Sheet.txt". Printed copies may be handed out to facilitate template entry, when you have many wishing to send a Radiogram. This worksheet is an HTML, that you can open and then copy/paste to any text editor.

General Information

The purpose of any of the family of Winlink Express Radiogram Text Creators is to provide a structured forms-based approach to producing a correctly formatted radiogram with a text output that appears in the Winlink Express New Message panel. The completed radiogram can then be sent to a regional Winlink-RRI Liaison Station. That station will then inject the radiogram into the traffic system.

A radiogram is simply a telegram message that is sent by a radio-only network that is comprised of amateur radio operators. These interoperable networks are sponsored by the ARRL (National Traffic System or NTS) and by Radio Relay International (RRI). The networks use phone, cw (Morse code) and digital modes. The cw and phone nets operate through a precisely sequenced and layered system of nets that cover local, section, region, area and transcontinental relays. The digital system consists of a mesh network configuration of automated data mode hubs that are accessed by appointed Digital Traffic Station (DTS) operators.

The system is structured to move many messages out of a disaster zone to a point near the destination.

The Radiogram Format

The radiogram format has been in existence since 1949 and is very similar to the old commercial Western Union telegram as well as contemporary military formats.

The radiogram has 4 primary sections, The following describes this Welfare specific version.

- The first line is the preamble and includes the message number (assigned by the originating station) and precedence (classification of the message i.e. Welfare or Test Welfare). This is followed by handling instructions for the delivering station. In this case there are no handling instructions since the message flow is one way from the affected area. The originating station is for the amateur radio call sign of the sending station. The check is the number of words/groups in the message body. The place of origination is the town and state (e.g. SEATTLE WA) where the message was created. This is followed by the time and date of origination.

- The preamble is followed by the recipients address and contact information. It is very important to note that routing through the entire system is based on the recipient's postal code, state and town. The street address and phone number (10 digits only 555 555 5555) and other information are used by the delivering station.

It is understood that in a situation where there are people who are displaced from their homes that they may not have complete contact information. The network is guided by human operators and it is possible to deliver messages with some level of incomplete information. Name, town and state are very important. An email address and state is sufficient if it is valid. Likewise a mobile phone number is sufficient and even better if it can accept text messages.

- The message body is enclosed between breaks (BT). For compatibility with all transmission modes, the radiogram uses a limited character set, as is true throughout the radiogram. The period character is interesting as there are several uses. A period at the end of a sentence becomes an X. A decimal point is R, such as 146R750 The ".com" in an email address is DOT COM. Other substitutions include QUERY for the question mark, ATSIGN for @, UNDERSCORE for _. The slant bar (slash) / is a permitted character. Telephone numbers are 10 digits - area code, exchange and number with no dashes. An entered extension is numbers only and will add EXT to the front. The / (stroke) can be entered and will remain as a /.

The Text Creator assists with all of this by making the substitutions for you, or not allowing certain characters.

- The last section is the signature of the sender. All radiograms must have a signature, (name). In the case of Welfare 3rd party messages, the signature is that of the person who provided the message - not the originating stations ham radio operator.

The first OP NOTE is for special instructions to the traffic handlers. This could be a note that the addressees phone number is a daytime work number, additional delivery instructions, etc. This is a place where the mobile phone provider (e.g. Verizon) could be added to simplify the process for delivery by text message.

The second OP NOTE is normally reserved for reply instructions but is not normally used for one-way Welfare traffic.

Please keep OP NOTES brief!

Getting the Message into the System

The traditional way to get a message into the network is to check into a local or section traffic net and transmit the message by voice or cw. As a Winlink operator, you will need to get your message to a Winlink-RRI Liaison Station. These are listed as tactical addresses in the drop down at the bottom of the form. When you are ready to send your message, select the Liaison Region that is associated with the addressee's location.

The most up to date information on RRI and message handling is being provided by Radio Relay International <http://radiorelay.org/>

The Traffic Operations Aid or Pink Card is a concise 2-page summary of radiogram formatting and transmission procedures for voice, cw and digital. Have a copy at your operating position as you enter a message into the Winlink Text Creator.

Direct link to the PDF: <https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/a7c9f25d-31a7-4462-ba9c-709656c16385/downloads/RRI-TRAFFIC-OPERATIONS-AID-1720r3.pdf?ver=1659017815248>

The RRI Publications page <https://radiorelay.org/publications> has a number of other useful guides and aids. Two of special note are the Traffic Operations Field Manual FM-001 and the RRI Training Manual TR-001.

Questions or suggestions concerning the Radiogram templates or their use may be submitted via Winlink to KB1TCE