KNW-115
GETTING TO KNOW YOUR RADIO

Knowing how to access the basic functions on the radios that you use during an emergency response is an important skill as emergency communicators. There have been several incidents during public service events where an operator could not change a parameter such as frequency, tone, power, etc. This affected net operations since an operator was not able to communicate due an issue such as the wrong tone being selected. The time to learn how to operate communications gear is not during a response.

Since transceivers vary in their features and menu systems, this will be a general guide rather than offer specific advice. The best source of information is often the owner's manual. The table of contents can narrow down your search quickly.

The first basic item is how the display works. You want to be able to determine if you are in VFO or Memory mode, what memory you are at presently, the offset used, and the tone mode used.

The second basic item is how to change from VFO to Memory. Most recent transceivers have at least one VFO and a set of memories to save frequently used frequencies including the offset and tone. You should also be able to save the contents of a VFO into a memory.

Since some transceivers contain a provision to display a memory tag rather than the actual frequency being used, you should be able to switch between displaying the memory tag and the actual frequency.

The third basic item is how to change the frequency, offset, and tone. These sound trivial, but being off-frequency, using the wrong offset, and using the wrong or no tone are the causes of the majority of the communications problems. If you have a multi-mode transceiver such as an IC-706MKIIG or FT-817, you also need to know how to set the modulation mode. If you are on an FM repeater, you do not want to use sideband.

The fourth basic item is how to disable the VOX, if applicable. VOX should never be enabled during a response since it is possible for stray sounds to trip the VOX. This ties up a communications channel. The Hurricane Watch Net prohibits the use of VOX for this reason.

The fifth basic item is how to lock and unlock the dial to prevent inadvertent frequency changes. It is possible to inadvertently change the frequency by bumping the dial.

The sixth basic item is how to change the power level.

You should also become familiar with the other features on the transceivers that you use such as microphone levels, meter display modes, and time-out timer features.

If you are assigned to an EOC or other facility with pre-deployed equipment, then become familiar with the equipment before an actual response. Have one of the operators already assigned to the facility show you how to use the equipment. If you can download the manuals or otherwise obtain copies of them, then do so and become familiar with the equipment before an actual response. This is also why it is a good idea to pack the manuals in your "Go Kit".

In the event that another operator needs to use your equipment, that operator can consult the manuals.