

Date: May 10, 2011

From: Santa Clara County ARES/RACES Packet Committee

Subject: Packet Network Update – New Client Software (Outpost/PacFORMS) Release v31

Attention: All ECs, AECs, MACs and other Santa Clara County Packet Users

This Packet Network Notice contains important information which affects your ability to access and use the county packet backbone. This update covers the following topics:

- Improvements to Outpost in SCCo Packet Installer v31
- Improvements to PacFORMS in SCCo Packet Installer v31
- Action items
- Questions / Comments / Concerns

Please read this information thoroughly and pass along to any packet users in your local area.

Improvements to Outpost in SCCo Packet Installer v31

The following improvements to Outpost are included in this release:

Launch PacFORMS from Outpost

PacFORMS messages can now be launched directly from Outpost using the “ICS Forms” menu. This eliminates having to locate the PacFORMS files separately. It also improves integration between Outpost and PacFORMS. When PacFORMS are launched from Outpost, Outpost sends key information to PacFORMS such as message number, operator call sign, and operator name. This information is inserted into the PacFORMS form, automatically numbering the message and identifying the operator. This allows Outpost to manage sequential message numbering for outgoing and incoming plain text and PacFORMS messages.

NOTE: with this new feature, both outbound and inbound message numbering are now ENABLED by default. If you prefer not to have Outpost manage either of these, you can adjust this in the “Tools > Message Settings > Msg Numbering” dialog box.

NOTE: for automated message numbering, it is important to set the three-character tactical ID. A button has been added to the above “Msg Numbering” dialog box to easily access this setting. It can also be accessed from the “Tools > Report Settings > Variables” dialog box.

Duplicate Bulletin Suppression

Outpost will no longer retrieve bulletins from a BBS if it has already retrieved the same bulletins from a different BBS. This will prevent duplicate bulletins from being downloaded to all the users of a given BBS if they have to switch to an alternate BBS. You can force bulletin retrieval by selecting “Actions > Force one-time bulletin retrieve” and then pressing “Send/Receive”.

Improved Channel Efficiency

When Outpost connects to a JNOS system, such as our county BBSs, if there are no messages listed for the user, Outpost will skip the "LM" command. This improves channel efficiency by eliminating a command & response sequence between Outpost and the BBS.

Locked "From" Field

Outpost connects to the BBS using the call sign configured in the Setup > Identification dialog box. When creating a message, Outpost automatically populates the "From:" field of the message with the same call sign. Previously, Outpost allowed the user to change the value in this field, even though doing so did not change the way Outpost connected to the BBS. This field is now locked to prevent user confusion.

New "DRAFT" Designation

If a message in the "Out Tray" is opened and then saved (by pressing the "Save" button instead of the "Send" button), the message receives a "draft" status and will not be sent out when Outpost performs a Send/Receive operation. This behavior has confused some users. So the message will now be marked with the word "DRAFT" in the "Type" column. To cause the draft message to be sent, open the message and the press "Send"; then press "Send/Receive".

Improvements to PacFORMS in SCCo Packet Installer v31

The following improvements to PacFORMS are included in this release:

Automatic Pre-Fill of Message Number and Operator Information

PacFORMS automatically pre-fills the message number, operator call sign and operator name from information it receives from Outpost. The information can be overwritten by the operator if desired.

Improved Channel Efficiency

PacFORMS no longer includes some comment text and no longer includes empty fields in the messages it creates. Examples of fields that are commonly left blank in ICS 213 Message forms are: From and To Name, From and To Phone Number, Reference, Action Taken, and CC. Based on a review of message traffic from the last drill, this will reduce average message size by 32%!

Automatic Default Browser Detection

PacFORMS automatically detects the default browser and uses that for displaying PacFORMS messages. This eliminates the need to manually configure the desired browser in the pac-read.ini file. The default browser can be overridden by editing the "C:\PacFORMS\exec\pac-read.ini" file.

Action Items

We recommend that all Santa Clara County packet network users perform the following actions as soon as possible:

1. Download v31 of the software from the county website at: <http://www.scc-ares-races.org/packet.html>

Note: ECs, AECs and hospital communicators will need the private version of the installer. The private version contains additional PacFORMS that are not available publicly. To obtain the private version, contact your EC.

2. Install the software and configure your personal settings, including:
 - a. Setup > Identification (name, call sign)
 - b. Setup > TNC (TNC type and port)
 - c. Setup > BBS (select assigned BBS)
 - d. Tools > Message Settings > Msg Numbering
 - e. Tools > Report Settings > Variables (for individuals, we recommend setting the three-character tactical ID to your initials).
3. Verify functionality by sending and receiving a plain text and a PacFORMS message to yourself.
4. Be prepared to use the new version for weekly check-ins next week (May 16, 17) and at the county drill on May 22.

Questions / Comments / Concerns

That's all for this update. If you have any questions, comments or concerns, it is likely that someone else does, too. So it would be helpful if you direct them to the scc-packet Yahoo group. That way, everyone can see the answer. URL: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/scc-packet>