



COAX CONNECTIONS

2012-01 (January)

"OA-Based Standards and Proficiency"

Digital (PDF) Edition

Issue Topic: Anticipated Predictability

FORWARD THIS ISSUE TO:

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- Adjacent OA organizations
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First Thoughts

Wayne Barringer KB6UJW

Happy New Year, and **welcome** to this inaugural issue of the "COAX Connections" in digital PDF format!

Standards are nothing new for emergency communications. There are many organizations with documented standards and protocols. And they

routinely practice them until each of their members is proficient.

Unfortunately, those standards apply only to the members of that specific organization. In most cases, they do not apply to members of other organizations. They do not apply "across" organizations.

Just as unfortunate, while the "when all else fails" mantra has been successful in licensing new amateur ("ham") radio operators, most have no idea/appreciation of what it takes or means to "be ready" for disaster or emergency communications!

As a result, many new licensees believe they are actually "prepared" for a disaster with only their license and a radio!

Adding to the confusion...most emergency communications organizations fail to keep accurate training records, and they cannot tell who has – but more importantly – who has NOT, participated and completed training.

Universal Standards

"Anticipated predictability" is a "key" element in mutual aid. Call "9-1-1" for a medical aid, and you have a high level of "anticipated predictability" what you "expect" to happen.

If an ambulance shows up with only a driver and no EMT, you automatically know something is WRONG!



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If a law enforcement officer arrives at a traffic accident, you automatically "expect" them to "take charge" and to begin restoring order.

You also have "anticipated predictability" when you call for a taxicab, or a plumber or a tow truck.

If a taxi driver looks "confused" when you give him an address, you just "know" that isn't normal.

If a plumber looks at you with "total confusion" on their face when you tell them your drain is not working, you

"know" you've got the wrong person for the job!

We "expect" a specific response in each situation because of our "anticipated predictability" levels.

Why should emergency communications be any different?

Up until now, there has never been a single set of "minimum standards" for all emergency communicators.

We hope to use V-C-N "ZR0-09AH" document series to change that.

Every emergency "first" responder organization has been "impacted" by the changes implemented since the tragic and unspeakable events of September 11, 2001.

Emergency "first" responders realize standards are the "foundation" for implementing/maintaining a mutual aid capability.

There are certain "standards" every emergency communicator, regardless of their organizational affiliation or geographical location, should be able to meet. (Visit V-C-N.org to see document "ZR0-09AH-G" for a list!), or use your Internet search engine:
V-C-N ZR0-09AH-G

And, even as emergency "volunteer" responders, we need to begin using standards as "common denominators" among organizations if we want to improve our capabilities.

Did You Know?

Volunteer training designated as "required" may not have records and no remedial or make-up sessions are available for those who missed the initial session!

Emergency communications is more than simply getting a license, buying a radio, and waiting for disaster.

It's also more than simply reading a book, taking a test, obtaining a certificate and actually believing a paper test can demonstrate proficiency!

We are no longer in pre-09/11 mode! Those days are long behind us.

Just like emergency "first" responder candidates, only *performance-based standards* prove the ability to perform a task or demonstrate proficiency.

We must use "performance-based" instead of "classroom-based" learning systems if we want to "prove" we can actually perform a task and do so successfully.

Instead, we need to focus on gaining the trust and confidence of other first responders and those in emergency management. We need to be able to demonstrate our proficiency by being evaluated using documented, object-standards.

We need objective, measurable skill levels and proficiency standards if we are going to change what some feel is a bunch of "undisciplined and untrained" volunteers.

And we cannot and should not forget the general public. Every opportunity to "demonstrate preparedness" is an opportunity to support the message of individual preparedness.

It's "time" for emergency communicators to develop a level of "anticipated predictability" that can be taught, observed and evaluated based on a set of documented standards.

During 2012, it's "time" to review and update how emergency "volunteer" responders *prepare for, respond to and recover from* a local incident.

We need to begin conducting training based on mission requirements, that are documented and objective, and can be evaluated repeatedly, with a high level of "anticipated predictability" and outcome.

Finally, we need accurate records to document our training activities, and to make those records available for inspection and review.

###

Why V-C-N?

Wayne Barringer KB6UJW

The NWCG¹ identifies standards on training and equipment across all fire service agencies. It is an independent organization providing guidance and direction on topics of interest to all in the profession.

Likewise, the Volunteer Communications Network (V-C-N) was formed to create a national set of proficiency standards applying across all emergency communicators, regardless of geographical location or their organizational affiliation.

To enhance standardized training of those proficiency standards, V-C-N created an Academy to offer comprehensive collection of training courses and materials.

Minimal Acceptable Performance Levels

The V-C-N is a neutral organization. It does not conduct recruitment initiatives or solicit for new members in your operational area.

The V-C-N is not a club. But it does sponsor the ZRCS² to provide unique organizational designators for implementing resource identification and management strategies.

The ZRCS was created in order to mirror the MACS³ and provide standards on resource identification and management within emergency “volunteer” responder communications.

Each organization (ARES, ACS, RACES, etc.) within an OA can apply for and be assigned a unique 3-digit designator (just like the MACS).

¹ National Wildfire Coordination Group (within the fire services)

² ZRCS = Category “Z” Radio (ZR) Coordination System

³ MACS = Multiple Agency Coordination System (within the fire service)

Fire agencies each have a 3-digit (MACS) designator. That 3-digit designator is used to identify and manage all resources belonging to that fire service organization.

The 3-digit designator is a very important aspect of implementing and maintaining the ICS.

The 3-digit designator is used to:

- ❑ Provide a unique identify to the organization.
- ❑ Identify and report resource status and availability.
- ❑ Create ICS-based incident numbers (ST-ORG-000000)
- ❑ Create and submit an Incident Activation Record (IAR)
- ❑ Reference incident resource requests for specific positions or capability.
- ❑ Create an ERD (emergency resource directory).

Resource identification and management is critical during “joint” operations, such as mutual aid.

Procedures were established on the counting of resources. Under those procedures, each resource should be counted only one time or the number of each resource “type” will ultimately be wrong.

When multiple agencies share a single resource, it should be entered on the resources of only one agency or organization at a time.

Emergency communicators can learn from this practice, as it is critical to counting the total number of emergency communicator resources within any specific OA.

- ❑ How many portable handheld VHF-UHF radios are there in your OA?
- ❑ How many radio operators have a VHF or a UHF radio mobile?
- ❑ How about mobile with VHF-UHF capability?
- ❑ How many VHF or UHF portable repeaters are available for emergency deployment?

V-C-N.org document “ZR4-07AA” features standards for identifying all equipment resources. V-C-N .org document “ZR4-08AB” features a standardized process of data collection and reporting. That process can be implemented by all participating organizations.

Each process and report is now standardized and documented. A usage memo explains the process, so each organization should complete it the same way, regardless of their geographical location.

All OA-based organizations can now collect and share their resource capability – using standardized codes (capability typing) – to compile one comprehensive OA-based report.

Again, V-C-N does is not a recruiting tool for local organizations. Under the ZRCS, however, V-C-N provides a standardized method of identifying and collecting equipment resources of OA-based “convergent volunteers” or those not affiliated with any other organization.

By creating a unique ZRCS in each OA for V-C-N, convergent volunteers can be identified and accounted for using a unique designator.

This also provides a strategy of identifying and including convergent volunteers equipment resources in your OA-based ERD⁴.

But that is not the only benefit of both implementing and using ZRCS for your organizational operations.

Incident Numbers

Under MACS guidelines, each fire service organization has a unique 3-digit organizational designator. That designator is used to conduct all resource identification and management operations.

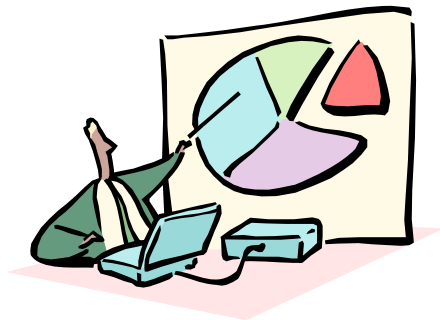
Every notification, activation or mobilization is an opportunity for volun-

⁴ Emergency Resource Directory

teers to practice operational policies, procedures & protocols.

Under ZRCS, participating organizations submit a request to V-C-N for a unique 3-digit organizational designator. That 3-digit designator is used by that organization to create their own unique incident number.

If they are assigned, unique incident numbers can be recorded and then analyzed to create statistics regarding operations. Those same statistics can easily be forgotten over time.



Using ZRCS, realistic incident numbers provide a documented history of notifications, activations and mobilizations. An IAR, or “*Incident Activation Record*” can be created and used to record the activities of your organization throughout the year.

By combining V-C-N standards and ZRCS unique organizational designators, emergency communications organizations can easily implement documented training strategies and objective evaluations based on “common denominator” standards and ICS-based field operations.

###



TH5P⁵: 2012

Wayne Barringer KB6UJW

“Documenting Preparedness”

Your local EMA⁶ likely uses an EOP⁷ or an ERP⁸ following a disaster.

Inside that EOP or ERP will normally be a list of local (actual or potential) threats and hazards, and a specific list of “things to do” following each.

Those lists are commonly used during training sessions and exercises to increase operational familiarity before disaster strikes.

Planning is an essential aspect when creating training programs. It is important for qualification specialists or training officers to know exactly what they are training for.

It is also important for training to be realistic and focus on the skills to be used when the plan is implemented.

Remember...

Plans and skills must be constantly practiced if operational familiarity is to be attained and (then) retained!

It is essential that local emergency “volunteer” communicators understand local threats and hazards if meaningful solutions are to be provided after a disaster strikes.

The development of any emergency plan begins after all local threats and hazards are identified. Any response should be based on those known or potential threats and hazards.

Once plans are created, they can be presented to your local EMA and be used to develop more realistic training programs based on the positions and skills needed to fulfill the plans.

⁵ Threat & Hazards: Plans, Policies, Procedures, Processes & Protocols

⁶ Emergency Management Agency

⁷ Emergency Operations Plan

⁸ Emergency Response Plan

Required Skill Levels

A response plan is actually nothing more than an intended plan of action. It should document what resources are or will be needed to meet (or to exceed) identified mission goals.

It should also identify what frequency or frequencies might be needed if all planned operations are implemented.

Planned operations? Yes, planned operations should be clearly identified in your plan.

Ideally, it will also identify the sequence positions are to be filled. If you only have two people, and you have five different positions in your plan, which positions are you going to fill first, second, third, etc.?

Next is to identify all of the skills and proficiency levels needed for each position. What procedures, protocols and processes should be required of all designated for mobilization?

If the initial frequency should be used to establish a resource net (RN), the radio operator assigned to that position should already be familiar with RN operations, protocols and forms.

That also means EVERYONE with an interest in being mobilized should attend classes on RN, conduct RN drills and maintain familiarity with all RN position duties and requirements.

- What ICS-214.ZR entries are required by those fulfilling the position of RN control station?
- Is there a standardized script available for quick reference?
- What other forms should be completed?
- Who is responsible to review those forms?
- After the incident, where should the forms be submitted?

Documenting your response plans is an excellent way to analyze each position needed and the skills each position should have to be successful during their assignment.

Documented plans also provide new members with a clear understanding of exactly what they will be expected to do following a disaster.

Standardized Training

Finally, documented plans become a “blueprint” for training programs and a more realistic way of evaluating if your training programs are on target for providing a viable, reliable emergency communications solution.



Documented plans will equal documented training programs based on incident-defined standards. Future training scenarios can feature those standardized skills.

Simulated emergency test (SET) exercises can highlight those skills as pre-requisites, making them more realistic, interesting and meaningful.

###

“How You Perform Is How You Will Be Remembered!”

Mutual Aid Programs

Wayne Barringer KB6UJW

Many OA-based emergency “first” responder organizations have mutual aid agreements (MAA) with neighboring jurisdictions. An MAA makes sense because they extend jurisdictional capabilities by temporarily borrowing neighboring resources.

MAA are common in professions like firefighting and law enforcement. If the same qualification and performance standards are shared among professions in both jurisdictions, then a high level of “anticipated predicta-

bility” should be “expected” during each MAA exchange.

Is an MAA meaningful if it just agrees to share bodies following a disaster?

MAA standards need to be defined if they are to be realistic. If two radio operator organizations sign an MAA and it neglects to include a specific set of qualification or performance criteria, what does it really mean?

When MAA training and proficiency standards are identified and documented, joint operations training can be implemented and evaluated.

Defining specific MAA standards can provide each organization with additional resources and more interesting training opportunities. This is important because not only should training include OA-based organizations, but also those organizations from neighboring OA jurisdictions.

Unless you are extremely lucky, it is unlikely any disaster or widespread incident will stop exactly at your OA border! It likely will impact organizations in surrounding OA jurisdictions.

Why not begin planning for and then conducting cross-OA training and exercises, even if on a totally volunteer basis?

If an MAA neglects or does not cover a cross-OA incident, your MAA is not acknowledging reality!

One of the distinct benefits of joining or forming an ARES^{®9} organization is government restrictions on training can be avoided.

However, all participants must clearly understand they are “individually responsible” if they are injured or otherwise impacted during their participation. In the end, the basic question still remains:

Who is responsible for emergency communicator proficiency?

⁹ Amateur Radio Emergency Service

If an MAA specifies proficiency levels for radio operators, but local governments do not offer or authorize participation in local training sessions, the end result is an unqualified pool of radio operators.

The same is true without an MAA. If local government is unable (or unwilling) to authorize members to participate in proficiency training, the result will be members that are not qualified and not proficient.

How can that be beneficial?

###

Resource Status

Wayne Barringer KB6UJW

Resource status, or “RESTAT” is a well-known term in organizations using ICS. RESTAT reports provide details on resource “status and availability” during a specific operational period or designated timeframe.

Organizations providing emergency response capabilities must learn to conduct accurate/timely RESTAT operations and create timely, reliable RESTAT reports.

Standardizing the RESTAT process and reports has many benefits. If multiple OA-based organizations use the same process and forms, they can reap the benefit of conducting a single training program and offer it to all participating organizations.

Emergency “first” responders commonly use three designations in their RESTAT reports following a disaster to determine resource availability:

- Available
- Delayed
- Out-of-Service

There is no reason why emergency communicators cannot use the same three designations when creating a RESTAT report following a disaster.

The V-C-N “ZR3-11AD” document series features a standardized form

for participating organizations to use to quickly (and accurately) identify the "status and availability" of local emergency communicator resources.

< Document "ZR3-11AD-F" >

Using standardized forms provides all participating organizations with additional training opportunities.

Using standardized forms to conduct RESTAT operations also increases the level of "anticipated predictability" others (including volunteer coordinators) "expect" from your organization.

RESTAT reports showing availability can be especially helpful when compared against organizational or OA-based emergency resource directories, especially when notified of an impending or possible situation.

Standardized forms = standardized processes. Organizations can begin conducting weekly RESTAT report operations. They can even conduct unscheduled operations just to practice or update outdated reports.

For details, click to: < <http://www.V-C-N.org/goto/news> >

###

"Preparedness and Proficiency is both an individual and an organizational responsibility.

Academy Updates

Visit the V-C-N.org Academy to see all new course offerings and course modifications: <http://dev.V-C-N.org>

Course 043

Updated: 2011-11.29-1229

Focuses on the ERD, or Emergency Resource Directory for emergency "volunteer" responder communications organizations.

This is the training course for implementing an ERD within/among OA-based organizations.

Course 015

Updated: 2011-12.11-1657

Provides details and information on "Introduction to Development and Proficiency" for emergency communicators and organizations.

Additional courses are scheduled to be published in the near future. Visit <http://dev.V-C-N.org> for details.

###

Incident Priorities

Under V-C-N.org guidelines, there are three standardized priorities for all volunteer communicators on any incident.

These are:

1. Safety
2. Monitor
3. Confirm

Safety – Never jeopardize the safety of yourself, other participants on the incident or the general public.

Monitor – Always monitor your designated or assigned frequency.

Confirm – Always obtain "confirmed acknowledgement" from the NCS before changing or modifying any aspect of your assignment.

V-C-N.org document "ZR3-10AE-F" highlights these incident priorities:

"How You Perform Is How You Will Be Remembered!"

ZR Incident Objectives

1. Provide for the safety of all incident participants and the general public.
 - Be aware of existing and report all new hazards immediately.
 - Maintain awareness and use of LCES at all times.
2. Create and maintain a viable network of emergency communications.
 - Always monitor your designated or assigned frequencies.
 - Acknowledge and relay all messages quickly with minimal delays.
3. Always obtain acknowledgement from the Net Control Station (NCS) before initiating ANY assignment change.

V-C-N.ORG.ZR3-10AE-F 2010-08-23-0832.DOC

< Document "ZR3-10AE-F" >

Want to download a free copy of this document. Simply use your Internet search engine and enter:

V-C-N ZR3-10AE-F

The document is available for download in convenient PDF format.

Once downloaded, it can be used at all operational briefings and included in an incident action plan (IAP).

###

Category "Z" Radio ICS

Wayne Barringer KB6UJW

The incident command system (ICS) requires the same "have-know-do" standards for each candidate wishing to qualify for the same position.

The position task book (PTB) is a collection of standardized tasks to be completed by all candidates for a designated position.

The ICS uses a "performance-based" learning system, requiring the "active participation" of potential candidates

by requiring they demonstrate their ability to perform specific tasks.

ICS has high levels of “anticipated predictability” because standards are documented and published.

That is why a specific skill set, such as a radio operator (ICS position code of “RADO”) can be requested with confidence. The candidate fulfilling that request has “already proven” they “have what it takes” because they have completed the PTB tasks for the RADO position.

The V-C-N developed the category “z” radio ICS using the original ICS as a model.

An extensive documentation library supports position duties and responsibilities, training requirements, standardized documents, and training.

Just like the ICS, all ZRICS positions are identified using a distinct set of 4-digit position codes (P-codes).



So, if the “incident” specifies a need for a field radio operator, the P-code of “ZR2F” should be used.

Only those individuals who maintain a rating for the “ZR2F” position would be assigned to the incident.

This greatly increases “anticipated predictability” the individual assigned will “meet or exceed” designated incident requirements because the individual has completed all “ZR2F” PTB tasks and requirements.

Just like the ICS of the fire services, ZRICS uses a “performance-based” learning system to teach and then to

evaluate task completion using a set of documented, objective standards. Each position within the ZRICS has a position description guide (PDG). It is available for download in convenient PDF format from our web site: < <http://www.ZRICS.org> >

Each PDG has specific duties and responsibilities to be conducted at the “home unit” and on the “incident” as well as during “in transit” periods.

Just like the ICS, the ZRICS uses a set of “objective based” standards to evaluate prospective candidates. All tasks to be completed can be viewed and practiced in advance because all have been documented in advance.

Just like in ICS, anyone can attempt to complete all pre-requisite training and performance-based tasks. Not all will succeed, but the training they receive and the knowledge they gain will enhance their ability as an emergency communicator.

Each time, regardless of differences in geographical location, the general public can “expect” a duplication in the levels of service.

“Anticipated predictability” needs to become part of our everyday training and proficiency. Standards need to be defined and implemented across organizational lines and OA borders.

We – as volunteer – need standards to increase the “anticipated predictability” levels of our “have-know-do” capability as we prepare for, respond to and recover from disaster!

##

Bits and Pieces

1. Documentation Management

The V-C-N and ZRICS library has an extensive collection of documents.

In order to reference and update any specific document, a unique naming convention and update process was

needed to quickly identify the most recent “version” of any document. In order to quickly identify any “version” of any document, a unique reference is included in the name of each file. That filename will typically appear at the bottom of each page.

However, if the document is part of our initial submissions, the “update” process of inserting the filename at the bottom of each page has not yet been completed.

A “special” date-time format appears at the end of each file name. Using that special format, we can quickly identify not only that specific document, but also it’s “version” so we use only the most recent update.

The date-time format used for V-C-N and ZRICS documents is:

“YYYY-MM-DD-TTTT”

The complex task of managing file folders and names is much easier if the date-time is used when sorting and identifying each “version” as part of the document management process.

On the V-C-N, site, the “Resources” page references the majority of all documents on the site. The link is: < <http://www.V-C-N.org/pages/resources,00.htm> >

2. V-C-N.org Academy Catalog

The tragic and unspeakable event of September 11th, 2001 affected all of us.

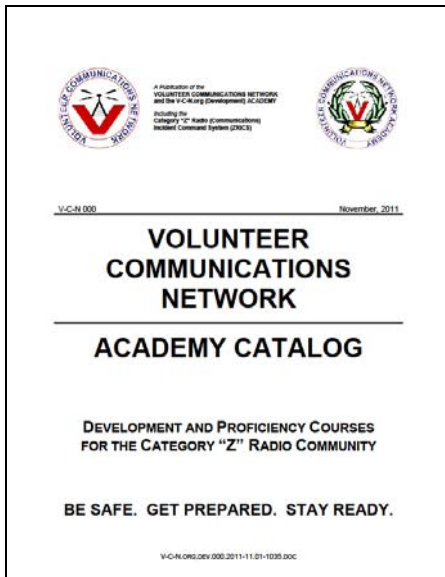
It also changed the way we prepare for, respond to and recover from an incident, regardless of size, scope or duration.

Standardizing the preparation and response process requires the use of courses and materials that can be duplicated, shared, taught, learned, observed and evaluated.

That concept forms the foundation of the ICS under NIMS, and it is duplicated in the ZRICS under V-C-N.

Creating a standardized series of training courses and materials is no easy task. First, courses need to be described and some way to identify each of the courses needs to be developed.

The naming convention used for all V-C-N Academy courses is a 3-digit numerical code.



“Anticipated predictability” levels will increase if a standardized series of training courses and materials are available and used to develop and conduct training sessions.

All draft and completed courses and materials in the Academy Catalog are available from the Academy web site of: < <http://dev.V-C-N.org> >.

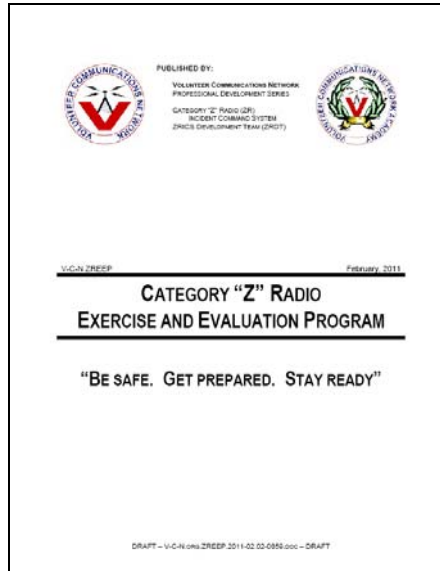
3. Category “Z” Radio Exercises

Emergency communicators and organizations use exercises to test and evaluate their skills, processes and capabilities.

As anyone who has been tasked with developing an exercise can attest, it takes a lot of time, effort and dedication to develop and put on an exercise that is meaningful.

Testing and evaluating skill levels or organizational processes/capabilities can be easily duplicated when the same set of standards are used to

develop and maintain proficiency levels.



Emergency “first” responders use the Department of Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (or “HSEEP”) when conducting/evaluating local exercises.

V-C-N has developed the Category “Z” Radio Exercise and Evaluation Program (or “ZREEP”) for emergency communications volunteers.

Like others, this document is in PDF format and available for download from the < <http://www.V-C-N.org> > web site.

Final Thoughts

Wayne Barringer KB6UJW

This inaugural issue has focused on “anticipated predictability” and how the benefits of standardized training and preparation can be used to enhance our image as a viable, reliable resource when providing emergency communications.

Since 2007, V-C-N has maintained a focus of identifying and documenting standards and creating the foundation of the ICS for category “z” radio emergency communications.

The entire documentation “library” is available for download and immediate implementation.

Admittedly, many of the documents are still in “DRAFT” format. But they can be used to create an organizational training program based entirely on standards and to increase both operational familiarity and radio operator proficiency.

Standardized Exercise Series

For most emergency communicator organizations, the designated position of “volunteer coordinator” is a collateral duty. Coordinating volunteer activities is “one of many” other duties assigned to that individual.

Obviously, agency or organizational “permission” is needed before operations are conducted on behalf of the agency or organization.

But “proficiency” remains the responsibility of individual radio operators.

It is YOUR responsibility to learn how to change the frequency on the radio you bring to the incident.

It is YOUR responsibility to know the protocols to conduct coordinated frequency “change management” operations safely.

It is YOUR responsibility to maintain your equipment.

It is YOUR responsibility to learn how to conduct a net control station or “NCS” and be ready to assume those responsibilities at any time.

Thank you again for taking time to read this issue. Got a comment? If you do, our < <http://www.V-C-N.org> > web site is available 24/7 to you.

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Additional copies of this publication are available for download in PDF format from:

< <http://www.V-C-N.org> >

(or)

< <http://www.ZRICS.org> >