

ROSS TIPS

ROSS TIP: REQ - 2004-4
Date: April 12, 2004
Subject: Using Request Number Blocks

What's in this Tip?

This ROSS tip will help the user understand the important aspects of using Request Number blocks. The tip contains Background Information; Definitions, Properties, & Rules, How to Set Up Request Blocks, Messages Encountered When Creating System-Generated Request Numbers, Messages Encountered When Creating User-Issued Request Numbers, Known Issues, and Cautions.

Background Information:

What is the Purpose of Request Number Blocks?

Request number blocks in ROSS allow a dispatch office to designate blocks of request numbers within each catalog for specific uses (e.g., initial attack, expanded, team orders, buying team). For each block, the user designates whether the request numbers will be system generated (numbered automatically by ROSS) or user issued (hand entered). Each ROSS incident has 999,999 request numbers available in each catalog.

This functionality accommodates users who wish to track initial attack orders on card stock (e.g., A-1 through A-6) and then begin entering orders in ROSS at the correct request number (A-7) without first having to go back and enter the first six requests in ROSS.

Creating blocks of user-issued request numbers also allows for hand entered non-consecutive request numbers in ROSS. To illustrate, let's say you have set up a user-issued request block for Overhead to be used by a Team. The block includes request numbers 500-3000. The Ordering Manager calls Expanded and places a request for O-552 / Dozer Boss. You go to the New Request screen, filter for DOZB, select your user-issued block 500-3000 and hand enter request number '552' (see Figure 1). The incident fills requests O-553 through O-556 with Fallers that were hired locally—so those requests don't get placed with Expanded. Next the Ordering manager calls Expanded to place a request for O-557 / Field Observer. Because block 500-3000 is a user-issued block, ROSS allows you to skip requests O-553 through O-556 and hand enter request O-557.

Now that this functionality is available, offices have the option to adopt a standard numbering system and apply it to each new incident. The following table is just one example of how this might be done. Later we'll explain how to use the Organization screen to set up such a system.

Purpose	Request Block Nos.	Block Type
Initial Attack	1 - 1000	User Issued (i.e., hand entered numbers)
Extended Attack	1001 - 2000	System Generated (i.e., ROSS creates the numbers)
Expanded	2001 - 10000	System Generated
Buying Team	10001 - 15000	System Generated
Incident / Team	15001 - 20000	User Issued
Area Command	20001 - 25000	System Generated
Extra block	25001 - 999999	System Generated

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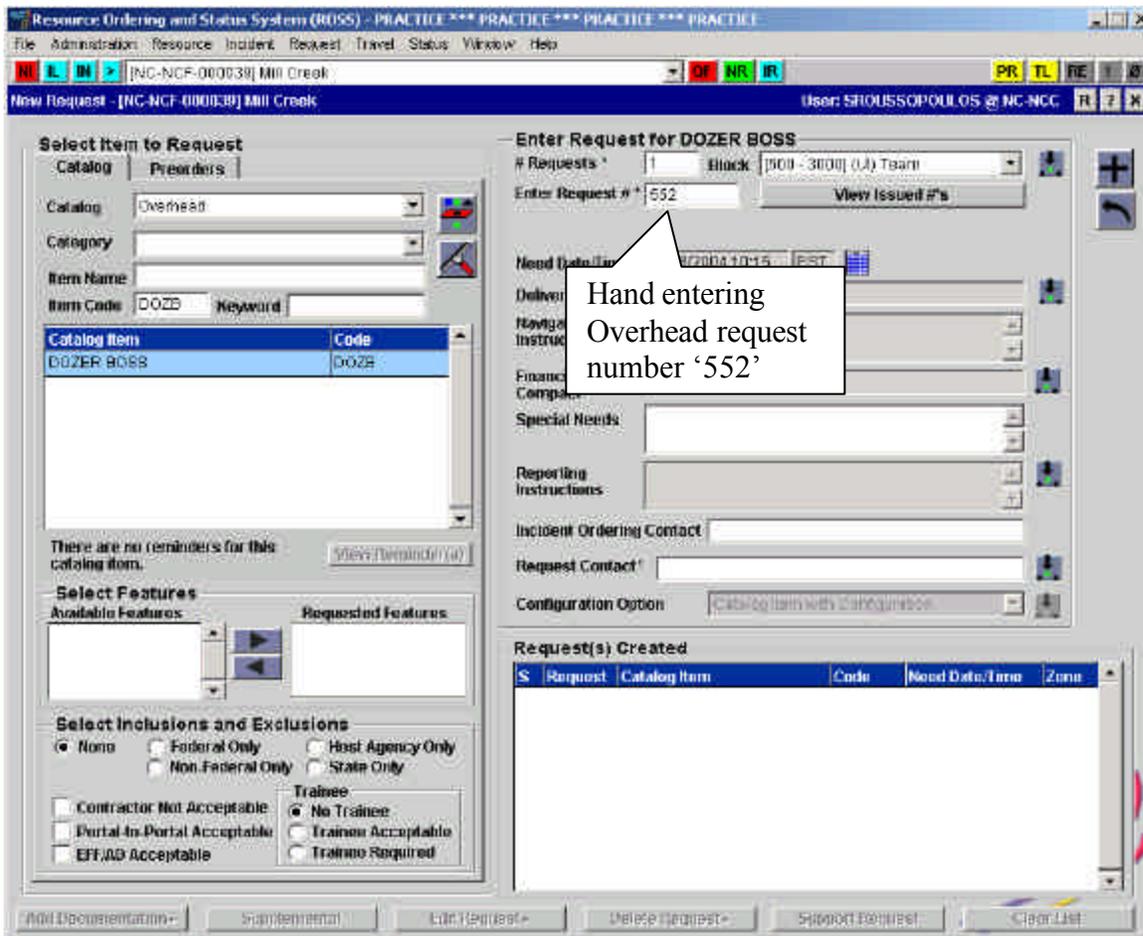


Fig. 1. – Hand entering a request number.

Are Users Required to Set Up Request Blocks?

No. If users do not identify request blocks then all request numbers will be system generated by ROSS. In other words, ROSS will operate as it did before the request number block functionality was added. Users also have the option to set up request blocks after an incident has begun.

Where Do Users Go to Set Up Request Blocks?

This functionality is available on the Organization, Incident and New Request screens. Where users choose to set up request blocks will depend on local business practices. The functionality is the same on all three screens. Here are some suggestions:

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- Use the Organization screen to apply the same numbering system to every new incident for a given Host organization. You can set this up one time for your Dispatch Center **and** each of your Host organizations. Then when you create an incident your block numbering scheme will be applied by default. This is the 'set it and forget it' option that will pay off in time savings when you are creating incidents and requests.
- Use the 'Request Numbering' tab on the Incident Screen to set up blocks for a specific incident. You may also use the Incident screen if you need to modify your default system for a given incident. Request blocks set up on the Incident screen only apply to the current incident and have no effect on any defaults you created on the Organization screen.
- Use the New Request screen to make changes to request number blocks on the fly. If you did not set up blocks on the Organization or Incident screens, you can use the New Request screen to set up blocks for the current incident, catalog-by catalog, as you are creating requests. Request block actions taken on the New Request screen are reflected on the Incident screen but do not affect the settings on the Organization screen.

Definitions, Properties & Rules:

Request Number Block:

- A defined set of request numbers (i.e., has a starting and ending number) by catalog.
- Blocks must be designated as **either** 'user issued (UI)' meaning that the user provides the request number, **or** 'system generated (SG)' meaning that the system automatically generates the request number.
- If no request number blocks are defined by the user, the default request number block is used. The default request number block is a system-generated block beginning with 1 and ending with 999999.
- Request number blocks may be split, merged or edited on three different screens (Organization, Incident and New Request).
- Default blocks for an Incident Host (organization) may be created on the Organization screen and viewed on the New Initial Report or Incident screen. A checkbox provides the option to use / not use the host's default settings when creating a new incident.
- Blocks must be named. Assigning a Purpose is optional.

System-Generated Block (SG):

- A type of request number block where ROSS automatically generates sequential request numbers.
- There **must** be at least one system-generated block in each catalog **and** the Terminal Block of request numbers (i.e., the block that includes request number 999999) **must** be system generated. Therefore, if a catalog has only one system-generated block it will be the Terminal Block.
- One system-generated block in each catalog **must** be designated as the default for system-generated requests (denoted by SYS). This is the block that ROSS uses to assign request numbers for QuickFill, Preorders and non-local support requests. The 'Default' button is used to change this setting.
- The SYS default block may not be deleted – the button is inactive.

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HINT: First designate another system-generated block as the SYS default then the 'Delete' button will be active.

- When splitting the Terminal Block, the user **may** designate the 1st part (lower numbers) as user issued. By definition, the 2nd part (which is now the Terminal Block) must remain system generated.
- When splitting a non-terminal system-generated block, the user **may** designate both parts as user issued.
- A system-generated block may be edited to make it user issued as long as it is not the Terminal Block **and** it is not the default for system-generated requests.
- The View Issued Numbers button does not apply to system-generated blocks.

User-Issued Block (UI):

- A type of request block where the user must enter (see Figure 7) a request number for each new request.
- For multiple requests, the user must enter the starting number.
- The 'View Issued Numbers' button displays user-issued request numbers for the pertinent catalog, in descending order.
- The user must set up UI blocks. This is the only way to enable hand-enter request numbers.
- When a UI block is split, the 'Split Block' dialog box requires that both resulting blocks be UI.
HINT: Use the 'Edit' button to change either one, or both, of them to system-generated blocks.
- When hand entering a request number it must fall within the selected UI block.

Default Block for Requests (R):

- The block that will be displayed at the top of the request number block drop-down on the New Request screen. If users know which block they will use the most, they can force that block to appear at the top of the list. This is the **only** purpose for this default designation.
- The Request Default may be **either** system generated **or** user issued (e.g., user may want the default for Supply Service requests to be a user-issued block and the default for Overhead requests to be system generated).
- The 'Default' button is used to change this setting.
- The Request Default block may not be deleted – the button is inactive.

HINT: First designate another block as the Request Default then the Delete button will be active.

How to Set Up Request Blocks

- On the Organization screen, select the radio button for the Dispatch Center. Select the Incident Hosts tab and click on the desired Host organization, in this case, Cape Hatteras National Seashore (Figure 2.).
NOTE: Use the 'Incident Numbering' tab to set up request blocks for incidents hosted by your dispatch center.

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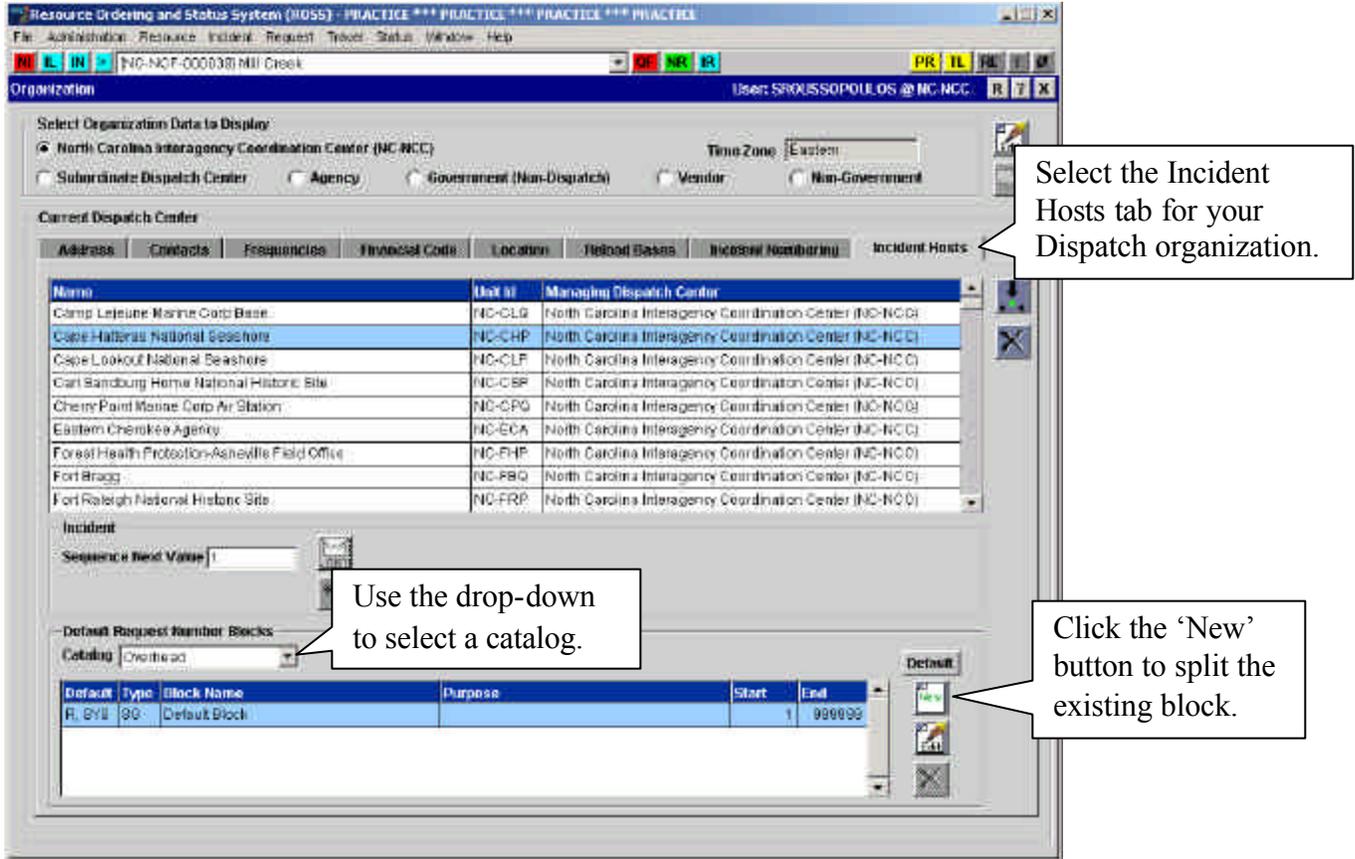


Fig. 2. – Preparing to set default overhead request blocks for Cape Hatteras.

- The Default Request Number Blocks panel is at the bottom of the screen. Select the catalog you want to work with (e.g., Overhead).
- Click the 'New' button in order to split the default block. The 'Split Block' dialog opens (Figure 3). **NOTE:** On the Split Block dialog you are **always** working with a Block #1 and a Block #2. These terms do not refer to the number of existing blocks for this catalog. **'Block #1' is what will remain of the block that you are splitting and 'Block #2' is the new block you are creating.**
- We want two overhead blocks. Numbers 1 to 20 will be for initial attack and these requests will be user issued. The second block will be system-generated requests 21 - 999999 to be used by expanded dispatch. We complete the dialog as follows and click 'OK':

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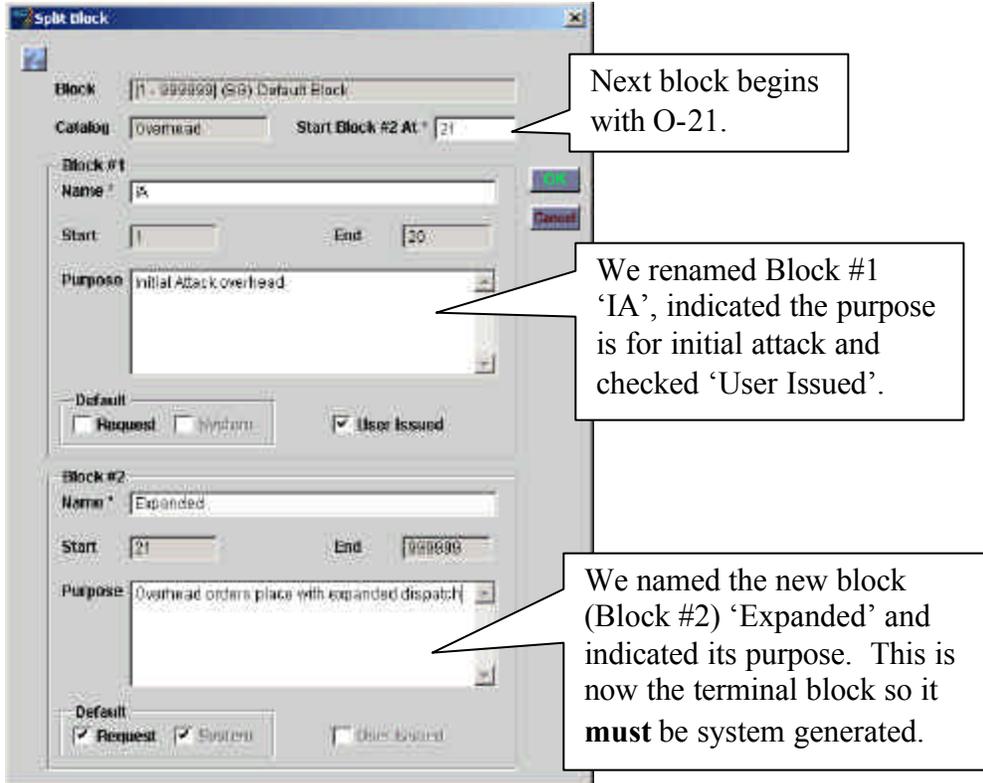


Fig. 3. – Split block dialog.

- Back on the Organization screen we see that there are now two default overhead request blocks for Cape Hatteras (Figure 4). Now any new incidents for Cape Hatteras will have these two overhead request blocks by default.

Default	Type	Block Name	Purpose	Start	End
UI	Request	IA	Initial Attack overhead	1	20
RT, SYS	System	Expanded	Overhead orders place with expanded dispatch	21	999999

Fig. 4. – The default overhead block has been split into two blocks.

- When creating an incident for Cape Hatteras, we always have the option to not use the default blocks by unchecking the 'Use Host Default Request Number Block(s)' checkbox (Figure 5). If we do this, all requests for the new incident would be system generated with numbers from 1-999999. The 'View Default Request Blocks' button can be used to review the Host's default settings.

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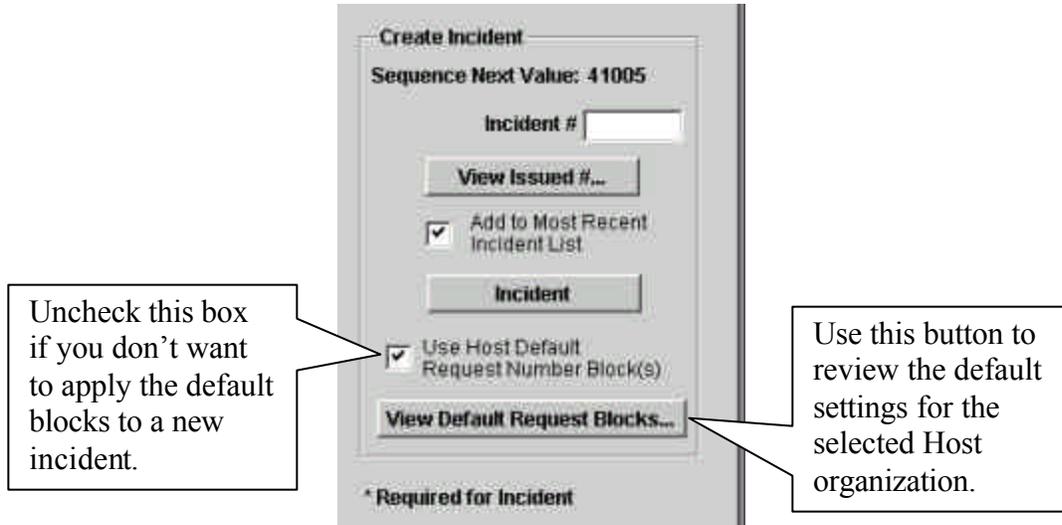


Fig. 5. – Deciding whether to use the default request blocks when creating an incident.

- After creating an incident, its request blocks can be viewed and adjusted on the 'Request Blocks' tab of the Incident screen (Figure 6). The functionality is the same as described above.

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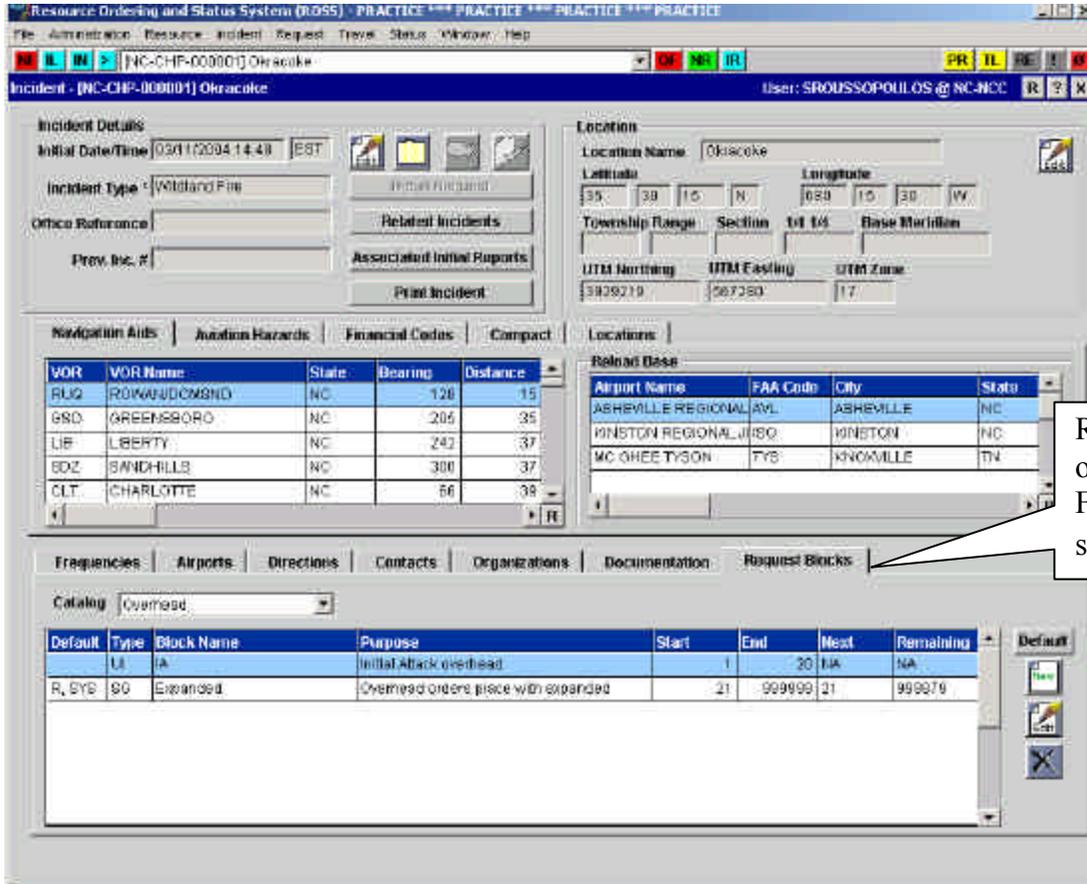


Fig. 6. – Cape Hatteras request blocks can be viewed and edited here.

- Request blocks can also be created and manipulated on the New Request screen (Figure 7). A drop-down lists the existing blocks for the current catalog. The display includes the starting and ending numbers, the type of block (UI or SG) and the block name. For example: [1001-3000 (UI) Team].

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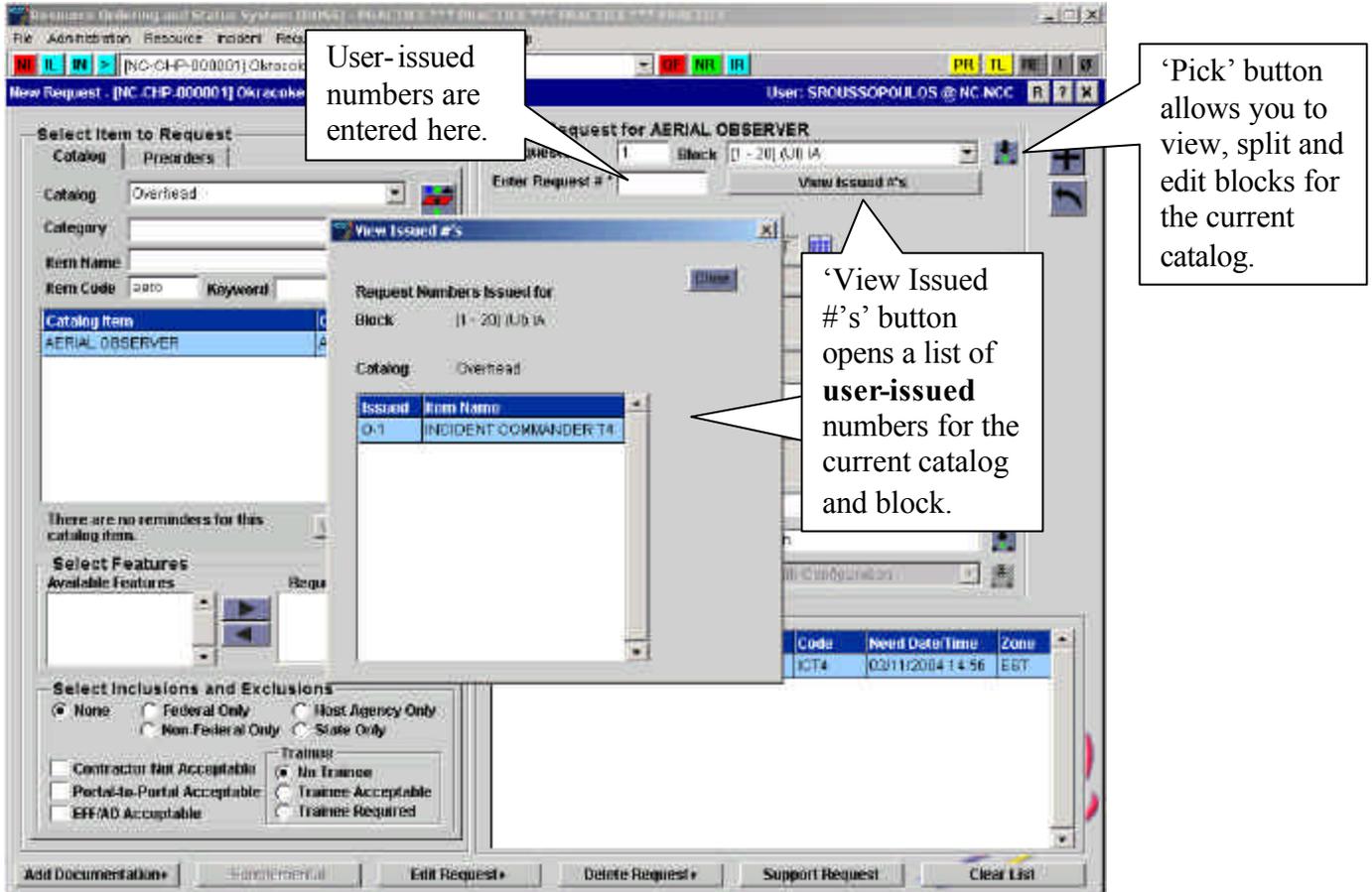


Fig. 7. – Dealing with Request Number Blocks on the New Request screen.

Messages Encountered When Creating System-Generated Request Numbers

- The following message is displayed when you create requests that **exactly** deplete the selected SG block. For example, block contains unused numbers [1-4] and you create four requests:

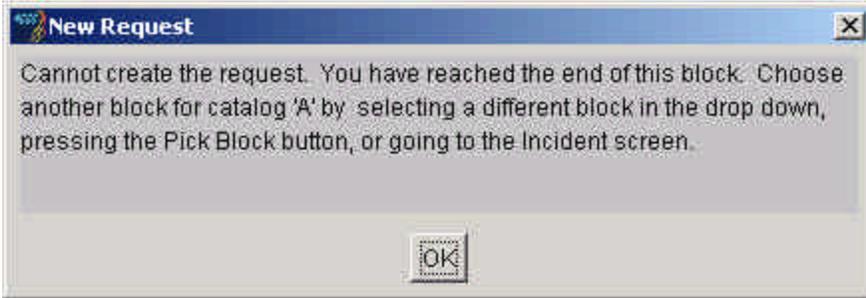


Result: The four requests are correctly created.

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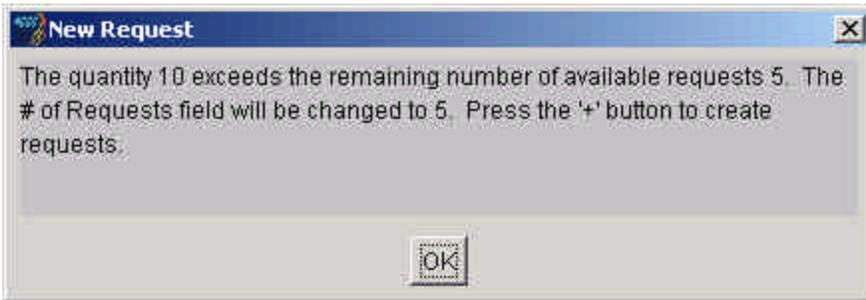
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- The following message is displayed when you attempt to create requests in a depleted SG block:



Result: No requests are created and you are returned to the New Request screen where you may select another block.

- The following message will be displayed if you attempt to create ten SG requests in a block that only has five remaining requests:



Result: After clicking 'OK' you are returned to the New Request screen where the number of requests has been changed to five (5). Now you have two options for creating the ten requests. You may go ahead and create the first five requests by pressing the '+' button and then select another block to create the remaining five requests. **In this case the ten requests may not be consecutively numbered.** To make sure the request are consecutive, use the drop-down to select a block that has at least ten remaining requests and then change the number of requests back to ten (10) before pressing the '+' button.

- **CAUTION:** It is possible to receive these three messages (above) when creating **non-local support requests**. However, users will not be able to select another block. The only block that is available when creating a non-local support request is the SYS default. Non-local offices are not permitted to edit request blocks set up by the incident dispatch.

WORKAROUND: Non-local users who encounter this situation should contact the incident dispatch and ask them to designate a new system default block. The contact information is available from 'View Request→Request Contact' or 'View Incident→Contacts'.

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Messages Encountered When Creating User-Issued Request Numbers

- The following message is displayed if you enter a request number that falls outside the selected UI block. In this case the user entered '5' and the selected block includes requests '1' through '4':



Result: No request is created and you are returned to the New Request screen where you can enter a different number or select another block.

- The following message is displayed if you enter a UI request number that has already been used, e.g., '4':



Result: No request is created and you are returned to the New Request screen where you may enter an unused number or select a different block.

- This message is displayed when you try to create more requests than are left in the selected UI block, e.g. ten requests in a block that has only five remaining numbers:



Result: No requests are created and you are returned to the New Request screen where you may view the issued numbers, change the number of requests or select another block.

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Known Issues:

Issue 1: The user creates a large UI block, uses a few numbers and then deletes the block. For example:

You create a UI block for Overhead of [1-10,000]. You use O-1 and O-2 then delete the UI block. You will be left with a SG block of [1-999999] but the next available number will be O-10001. It appears that the numbers [3-10,000] have been lost. **Don't panic.**

To get the numbers back you must split the SG block and create a UI block of at least one [1] request. For example: You decide it is more realistic for your UI block for Overhead to go up to 100. Split the SG block and make Block #1 UI from [3-100] and Block #2 SG from [101-999999]

HINT: Another way to resolve the large UI block is to split it first. Make Block #2 [101-10,000]. Then Block 2 can be deleted / merged into the terminal SG block [101-999999].

Issue 2: Users can split blocks, create requests, merge blocks and then split them again in such a way that creating a system-generated request will result in the following error message:



Result: Duplicate request numbers **are not** being issued.

Example that will produce the error:

1. Split the Crew SG default block [1-999999] into two parts, as follows:
UI = [1-100]
SG = [101-999999]
2. Create UI Crew requests, e.g., C-7, C-8 and C-9
3. Delete / Merge the UI block back into the SG [1-999999]
4. Split the SG into two parts again, as follows:
UI = [1-6]
SG = [7-999999]
5. Attempt to create a SG Crew request. The error message will be displayed.

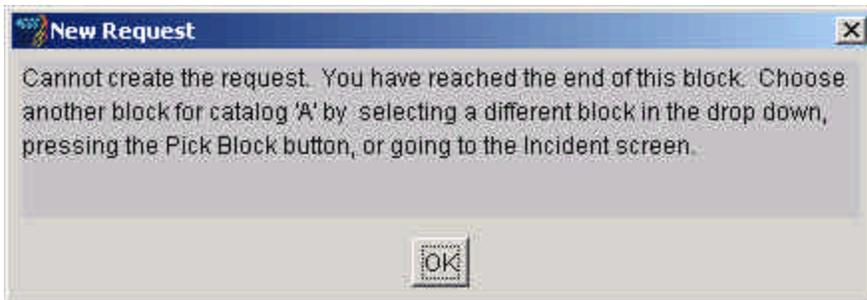
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Workaround: The problem occurs in step '4'. You must set the UI block to **include all the user-issued requests that have been created**, e.g., [1-9]. The SG block should be [10-999999]. You may have to refer to the Request Status screen or Request List report to determine where to split the block.

Issue 3: Users who define too small a default block for system-generated requests run the risk of exhausting the block. This should be avoided because preorders and non-local support requests **must** be generated from the default SYS block. To illustrate:

1. Split the Aircraft SG default block [1-999999] into two parts, as follows:
UI = [1-999989]
SG = [999990-999999]
2. Create ten SG Aircraft requests, e.g., E-999990 through E-999999.
3. The following message is generated:



Workaround:

4. Split the UI block into two UI blocks. The first one should contain a realistic estimate of the UI requests needed for that catalog: For example:
UI #1 = [1-1000]
UI #2 = [1001-999989] and then click OK.
5. Back on the 'Pick Block' dialog, select the new UI #2 and click 'Edit'. Uncheck the 'User-Issued' checkbox and click OK. The new block is now system generated.
6. Back on the 'Pick Block' dialog, select the new SG block and click 'Default'. Select 'Set System Default'.

Issue 4: When users reset the Default for Requests on the 'Split Block' dialog (from one block to another) a pop-up message is displayed "Please remind the **incident** that Request Default block has changed". Remember, all this default setting does is identify which block is displayed at the top of the request number block drop-down on the New Request screen. Therefore, it is more **important to remind the local dispatchers that it has changed**. Also, the message is not displayed when the 'Edit' button is used to change the request default.

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Cautions:

- Despite the terminology, blocks are never really '**deleted**'. They may be **merged** back together – but there are always [1-999999] requests per catalog. If there are blocks before and after the one you are 'removing' you must select the one to merge with.
- Any changes made to the Request Number blocks for a given host on the Organization screen **do not affect existing incidents** for that host. You must use the Incident or New Request screens to split, edit or merge blocks for an existing incident.
- Try to keep block names short, e.g., 'IA' instead of 'Initial Attack'. Names longer than 8-10 characters may not be fully displayed on the dropdown menu on the New Request screen. Duplicate names are permitted but not recommended.
- The 'Purpose' field is 1,500 characters but the grid only displays the first 34 characters.