

October 25, 2020 WC-ARES Net Training: The Changing Role of ARES

Presented by Hal Miles, AD5L

A portion of this training has been taken from the ARRL *Introduction to Emergency Communication Course*, 4th Edition.

What is the role of ARES? If you ask most members, they will answer “We provide amateur radio communications during emergencies where normal communications have failed.” While this has been true for many decades, the role of ARES is changing. A better answer is, “We are communicators who are trained to help served agencies during an emergency.”

As Paul Gilbert KE5ZW, our new ARRL Director of Emergency Management mentioned in our WC-ARES meeting this month, our role is changing. He said that it used to take a cellular company 6 weeks to repair a cell tower damaged by a hurricane. Now, they can put a COW (Cell On Wheels) on line in 6 hours.

In general, emcomm groups, such as ARES, should be prepared to perform various jobs for their served agency. Here a few of the many possible job descriptions.

- Radio operator, using Amateur or served agency radio systems. While hurricane Harvey, the worst storm in Texas history that caused massive flooding in Houston, it did little damage to the communications structure. A couple of our members were dispatched to Houston and became Net Control Operator for a Citizens Band Radio. Why? They had the necessary FEMA training, and were proficient at net control. Their job was to direct 18 wheelers coming into Houston with emergency supplies, a very important job that few were trained to do. (Plug: Hey, you members that have taken the NCS training class and have not run this training net, please jump in and practice. We welcome your mistakes on this net rather than in a real emergency.)
- Dispatcher, organizing the flow of personnel, vehicles and supplies. A while back, we had a drill where we copied police and fire dispatches in the event of lost 911 radio communication. This is a drill that we should repeat. Drills, such as bike rides, provide valuable training for this kind of activity.
- Resource coordinator, organizing the assignment of disaster relief volunteers. We use an EAP (ICS 201) for planning and carrying out our drills that can be adapted for these activities..
- Field observer, watching and reporting weather or other conditions. We have been doing this function for decades and will continue in the future. When it comes to weather, we are better trained than most of the agencies we serve. We have the ability to be “eyes in the field”.

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- Damage assessor, evaluating and reporting damage conditions. This is an expansion of a field observer. We have had a limited amount of training in this area and possibly should have a refresher.
- Van driver, moving people or supplies from location to location.
- Searcher, also providing communication for a search and rescue team.

To perform these jobs, you may need to complete task specific training courses and take part in exercises and drills in addition to those required for emergency communications even beyond traditional Amateur Radio. In the ever changing world of emergency response, this flexibility will become increasingly important if we are to continue our contribution to public safety as Amateur Radio operators.

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Submitted by Hal AD5L