

**PSV-106**  
**WORKING WITH PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICIALS**

Modified from a Waller County ARES training article.

Meeting the communications needs of "served" agencies is quite a challenge in today's complex disaster/emergency relief arena. The number of emergency relief organizations and their increasingly sophisticated needs, all competing for that scarce resource--the volunteer. The activity of other non-amateur volunteers makes the picture even more complicated. As more of the population moves to disaster-prone areas, and less government funding is available, more pressure is placed on agencies to use (and sometimes abuse) the volunteer sector for support of their missions in disasters. Toes are sometimes stepped on and a volunteer's morale can be undermined.

On the other hand, the ARRL's formal relationships with served agencies are vitally important and valuable to radio amateurs. They provide us with the opportunity to contribute meaningfully. Another substantial benefit not to be overlooked is that these relationships lend legitimacy and credibility for Amateur Radio's public service capability.

**What to Do?**

The answer is not the same for every ARES unit everywhere. How we develop our relationships with served agencies depends upon many factors, and these factors are not the same from state to state, county to county or even city to city. The best that can be done in this short discussion is to explore possibilities, so that we are aware of all approaches to our problem. In the end, the adaptation of solutions to problems of serving agencies is up to the local Emergency Coordinator (EC).

Two general approaches have developed over the years. Both have proven to be useful and both are in use right now.

1. Traditional - potential served agencies are solicited by the EC. When enough are found, agreements are made and the ARES unit tries to serve them during emergencies.
2. Emergency Management (EM). The ARES unit attaches itself to the local Emergency Management unit (a unit of government charged with allocating resources during all emergencies). During emergencies, the head of Emergency Management (the "Emergency Manager") tells the EC where communications support is most needed. The EC makes all assignments to meet those needs.

This is a brief explanation of the EM model, since it is an emerging, non-traditional approach. Federal law designates that each county in the US has an Emergency Manager, whose job it is to allocate resources during times of emergency. For example, if a tornado devastates a city, the county EM may call on the county Sheriff to provide officers to augment the city's police services, ask a neighboring county to provide additional EMTs and vehicles, contract with a local heavy equipment contractor to supply bulldozers, cranes and other equipment for rescue operations, and so on. The Emergency Manager has the statutory power, and statutory responsibility, to coordinate these operations. The essential activity in this job is management of resources during emergencies. An ARES unit is a volunteer emergency communications resource!

Some ARES units have attached themselves, by mutual consent, to Emergency Management departments. The county Emergency Manager allocates the ARES unit's communications abilities during emergencies just like any other important resource. That is, the EM tells the EC where communications links are most needed. The EC then does all the usual tasks; assigning operators and equipment, making relief schedules, and so on.

This arrangement has several benefits. First, the person who knows most what is needed in the emergency and who has the statutory job to meet those needs- the Emergency Manager - decides what overall task(s) the ARES unit is assigned to. The EC does not have to decide, for example, that it is more important to serve the Red Cross than the Salvation Army during a particular incident.

Second, the EC does not have to "beat the bushes" looking for agencies to serve. The ARES unit is simply a volunteer arm of Emergency Management and serves agencies as they are assigned by the Emergency Manager.

Third, the ARES unit may be given a meeting place in the Emergency Operations Center, maintained under the Department of Emergency Management. Some ARES units have even been given a separate Emergency Communications Center - a room where ham radio and public service radio equipment is stored and operated. Some Emergency Managers have allocated funds in their budget to purchase ham radios and antennas to support the mission of their attached ARES groups. As trust and mutual respect develops, hams are sometimes given even greater responsibility. At least one EC has been made Deputy Director of Emergency Management, a volunteer position with even greater opportunity to serve the public in time of need.

Finally, there is training. Attachment to Emergency Management opens doors to a huge opportunity for emergency training at the local, state and federal levels. The Emergency Manager can authorize enrollment in a number of training courses offered at the state or national level.

### GENERAL PRINCIPLES

What things are necessary when serving agencies? There are some underlying principles.

1. Everyone must know exactly with whom they are dealing.
  - a. It is important that agency managers know who leads the ARES unit (EC) and that all recruitment and utilization of operators is directed by that leader. Make sure they are aware of our local and general ARES policies, capabilities and probably most important limitations in operators and equipment. They should also be aware of who our "boss" is in ARES - our District Emergency Coordinator (DEC) and Section Emergency Coordinator (SEC) and the role each plays in emergency response. We want to make them aware of policies such as message format, security of message transmission, Disaster Welfare Inquiry and others that will affect the way you serve them. If we have other agencies to serve, let them know that, too.
  - b. It is important that the EC know the policies and hierarchy of each agency it is serving. Whom will the EC interface with in an emergency? Who are their bosses? What policies does that agency have in place that may impact how ARES serves them? What other volunteer communications units will serve them?
2. Everyone must know what to expect. A detailed operations plan should be developed with a served agency that sets forth precisely what each organization's expectations are during emergencies. ARES and agency officials must work jointly to establish protocols for mutual trust and respect. Mutual trust and respect develops when expectations are known and fulfilled.
3. Do not exceed abilities. A challenge ARES faces is the number of agencies that demand communications support during a disaster. A local ARES unit only has so much to go around, and it cannot possibly meet every agency's needs.

The League maintains several formal Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with disaster and emergency response agencies including the Federal Emergency Management Agency, National Weather

Service, Red Cross, Salvation Army, National Communications System, and Associated Public Safety Communications Officers. However, these documents are merely a framework for possible cooperation at the local level. While they are designed to encourage mutual recognition, cooperation and coordination, they should not be interpreted as to commit, obligate or mandate in any way that an ARES unit must serve a particular agency, or meet all of its needs, in a jurisdiction. MOUs are "door openers," to help us get our foot in the door--that's all. It is up to us to decide to pursue a local operational plan with an agency. That decision will be based on a number of factors including the local needs of the agency and the resources we have available to support those needs, given that we may have other prioritized commitments as well.

Given the above, we should also be working for growth in your ARES program, making it a stronger, more valuable resource and able to meet more of the agencies' local needs. There are new Technicians coming into the amateur service that would make ideal additions to an ARES roster. A stronger ARES means a better ability to serve your communities in times of need and a greater sense of pride for Amateur Radio by both amateurs and the public. That's good for all of us.

### Competition

With a strong ARES program, and a capability of substantially meeting most of the local served agencies' needs, we want to avoid another problem that is cropping up in some parts of the country, that of "competition" with emerging amateur groups providing similar communications services outside of ARES. Some of these groups may feel that their local ARES doesn't do the job, or personality conflicts and egos get in the way, so they set up shop for themselves, working directly with agency officials, and usurping ARES' traditional role. Some agencies have been receptive to their assistance.

There continues to be "RACES versus ARES" polarization in some areas. Some agencies, including at least one with statewide jurisdiction, are forming their own auxiliary communications groups, and recruiting their own hams, some away from ARES. In other states, the problem has been solved by making every ARES ham a RACES operator, and vice versa. We need to work to find and provide the best services we can. Strive for growth and enhancement of ARES members' abilities, and make sure we present a "professional" face to potential "served" agencies and our opportunities will grow. If we can make our program better than the next guy's the agencies will be more attracted to us.

We may need to set aside egos and personalities and seek out these other groups and take the initiative to try to establish a rapport, and the fact that "we're all in this together," for the good of the public and Amateur Radio. With good communication, mutual respect and understanding between us and the other groups, we should be able to coordinate our program's missions with theirs to foster an efficient and effective Amateur Radio response overall. At best, we may find other groups willing to fold their tents and join our group.