

# Lee County ARES Storm Spotting Policy

SKYWARN is comprised of storm spotters - **not** storm chasers. Chasing is an extremely dangerous activity, and should be left to the professionals with advanced meteorological training, the proper tools, and seasoned experience. Storm chasing cannot be learned by watching television programs that magnify its allure. **Storm chasing is not condoned by Lee County ARES (Lee-CARES) in any form.**

## **Storm Spotter Safety: Your #1 Priority**

Accurate and timely spotter reports are critical to our local community and to the National Weather Service. However, your first priority as a storm spotter is to STAY SAFE! Severe storms present a number of hazards, any of which could lead to injury or death if you're not extremely careful. Depending on whether you are spotting from your vehicle or from a fixed location (like a home or business), there are hazards you need to be aware of and plan for when you're observing storms.

Mobile SKYWARN spotters are those who observe storms from their vehicle, or from a position other than their home or business. In many communities, there are pre-determined observation sites that typically have unobstructed views of the horizon. When spotters are activated, they go to these designated locations to observe and report weather conditions. Some spotters stay mobile during the storm and attempt to move along with it to maintain a view of the "action area" and report any changes as the storm progresses.

**NOTE:** The National Weather Service does not condone, endorse or recommend storm chasing. It is a dangerous practice and should not be attempted.

However, we understand the vital need for storm spotter reports and fully support SKYWARN, a program administered by the National Weather Service (NWS). Many of our members are also trained SKYWARN spotters, and we conduct SKYWARN nets in support of the NWS. We realize that some of our members, as well as non-ARES amateurs, will want to engage in mobile storm spotting activities during the threat of severe weather. This is a choice made entirely by the individual, and not part of official LEE-CARES operations.

LEE-CARES members that participate as SKYWARN spotters are expected to understand and follow the storm spotting guidelines and safety practices that are published on this web page, elsewhere on this web site, in official LEE-CARES Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and documentation, and provided by the NWS.

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Mobile storm spotter communication with the SKYWARN Net Control is essential to personal safety. If you are a LEE-CARES member engaged in mobile storm spotting activity, you are expected to:

- Advise the SKYWARN Net Control when you are in route to a designated spotter location, and specify which one.
- Check in with the NCS upon your arrival, and report your status every 10-15 minutes while there, when practical.
- If you perform mobile storm spotting from places other than designated spotter sites, advise the NCS of your exact location and update your status, as appropriate.
- Let the NCS know when you leave a spotter location.

When driving a vehicle while observing storms, do not use any rotating lights, strobes, flashers, wig-wags, or other attention-getting devices. Turn off your headlights while parked to minimize your impact on other motorists. To help warn approaching traffic of your presence, turn on your hazard (four-way) flashers when stationary and use them only while parked. While stationary at a spotter location, the use of rotating lights, strobes, flashers, etc. that do not create an unnecessary distraction for other drivers, is permissible. All applicable laws regarding the color of any illuminated lights must be followed at all times. It is strongly recommended that no more than a total of two illuminated rotating lights, flashing light units, or strobe units be visible from the front, sides, or rear of the vehicle. This will indicate to passing law enforcement officials and motorists that the vehicle is not in distress without creating an unnecessary distraction.

It is common for amateur radio operators to also act as SKYWARN spotters for the National Weather Service, if they have received the proper training. Storm spotting performed by LEE-CARES personnel is done of their own accord, not as a LEE-CARES function. In that role, individuals are acting as SKYWARN volunteers for the NWS.

LEE-CARES provide communications support for the NWS by conducting SKYWARN nets. As detailed in the SKYWARN Operations Plan, the mission for LEE-CARES when working with the NWS (as a served agency), is rather simple: **Relay severe weather reports to the National Weather Service.** This is the only "official" role of LEE-CARES in NWS activities.

- When you are storm spotting, and reporting severe weather conditions, you are acting as a SKYWARN volunteer for NWS
- When you are helping provide communications (as a Net Control, Alternate Net Control, or Liaison) to relay severe weather reports to the NWS, you are engaging in an LEE-CARES activity

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Being a SKYWARN spotter and conducting a WC-ARES/SKYWARN Net are separate and distinct functions, with one under the direction of the NWS, and the other a mission of WC-ARES. LEE-CARES does not train, deploy, or manage SKYWARN spotters; that is the role of the NWS through its SKYWARN program. LEE-CARES only provides infrastructure (SKYWARN Nets) by which reports from spotters (working for the NWS) can be relayed to the NWS.

*Any questions about this policy should be directed to the Lee County ARES Emergency Coordinator (EC), or the District Emergency Coordinator (DEC) for South Texas ARES District 7.*