

## SKYWARN® for ARES Members

SKYWARN® and ARES may seem to be synonymous to many people. Although they both deal with hazardous events, where they differ is that SKYWARN® deals only with thunderstorms, ARES deals with all hazards.

SKYWARN® was founded in the 1970s as a national program whereby National Weather Service trains volunteers to be severe weather spotters. This mainly deals with thunderstorms, winter storms, precipitation types, flooding, and tornados. These spotters help the National Weather Service to gather ground truth information, situational awareness, and assistance in verification efforts during severe weather situations. So SKYWARN® is strictly a severe weather service and a large part of the volunteers are amateur radio operators.

These two work beautifully together as severe weather is a hazardous situation and amateur radio operators can help the National Weather Service in collecting information to compliment their reports. It is natural that ARES partners with SKYWARN®.

One way ARES helps is the dissemination of news and weather reports to the general population.

The other way to help is to provide ground truth information, situational awareness, and assistance in verification efforts. Radar can tell you what is happening up in the sky and what it looks like should be happening at ground level, but it can not tell you that it is actually happening at ground level. Hence, having people who are spotting the weather and letting the NWS know what is happening in an area helps them gain a more complete picture of the event as well as helping them improve their storm predictions.

If you would like to be involved with SKYWARN® on your own, you need to take the class from the NWS. You can check the NWS website under the Austin/San Antonio page (the section Lee County is in) for training times. There is a Basic class and Advanced class. The day I took the training it was virtual, and they provided both classes, and when you finished you filled out a form and received your certificate. You can watch videos of past classes which is always a good idea to remind yourself of the different aspects of weather. I found it hard to absorb it all at once so I do watch the videos. There is also a handout to download.

Once you are certified with them, when there is weather, you can contact them directly through their preferred methods to pass on information. You may also join the SKYWARN® net with your local ARES and report to Net Control what is happening where you are at. The complete report from all check ins is passed on to the National Weather Service.

There will be specific things that the NWS will be looking for depending on the type of storm. Most often though they would like to know the rain fall rate, if there is hail and the size of it, and the wind speed. If there is the possibility of tornadic activity, then they also would like any cloud observations.

When giving a report they need to know where you are seeing or experiencing weather. This is not an exact address though. What they want is a reference to cross roads. So from my home, I would report that whatever I observe is happening at E. FM 696 and CR 407. And of course, always use ITU phonetics when giving call signs. Speak clearly so that the logger can get all your information quickly and easily. They will repeat it back to be sure it is accurate and you can correct anything or agree that is correct.

An extra bonus for the NWS is for you to send in pictures. For hail, when it is safe to go out, check the hail and get an idea of the average size as well as the largest one. Lay your hail beside a ruler or a coin. Something of familiar size. Also when it looks tornadic you can get a picture of the cloud rotations or even the actual sighting of the tornado. Video is very good in this case.

If weather fascinates you, if you love helping others, this is a way of covering both. Get into the habit now of checking the weather each day and the forecast. Keep an eye out for what is happening in the skies above you and you may help someone one day avoid a disaster.