

PSV-106  
WORKING WITH PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICIALS  
By Harris Co. ARES  
Edited and Aired by KD5BJ

Personalized for Lee Co. ARES from a Waller County ARES training article written by Christine Smith, N5CAS (sk) and aired tonight in her honor and memory.

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 compete 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 in a meaningful way. 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) according to the talents, character, and style of the County and all involved.

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.

Our Lee County ARES is a hybrid between the two. We certainly bring to then County Judge Paul Fisher the problem of public officials and First Responders communicating with rural Lee County and agreed with him to have a Memorandum of Understanding between the County and ARES. We also started recently a relationship with our County VFDs and Giddings PD. On the other hand, we have been assigned to the Emergency Coordinator or, if unavailable, to the Sheriff to tell me the EC where to serve and in what capacity.

This is a brief explanation of the EM model since it is an emerging, non-traditional approach. Federal law stipulates that each county in the US has an Emergency Manager whose job it is to allocate resources during times of emergency. The Emergency Manager falls on the County Judge, who may delegate it to a special person that we call Emergency Manager or Coordinator.

For example, if a tornado devastates a city, the county EM, or Judge in his/her absence, may call on the county Sheriff to provide officers to augment the city’s police services, to ask a neighboring county to provide additional EMTs and vehicles, to 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, like the others above mentioned, is a volunteer emergency communications resource!

We in Lee County would be allocated as a resource by County EM Jason Snelgrove during an emergency like any other important resource. He will allocate communications links where will be most needed and will tell the EC; I will assign operators and equipment where requested and will make relief schedules etc. In other words, the ARES EC functions like a liaison officer with the County Emergency Management and will pass and coordinate efforts to ARES members.

This arrangement has several benefits: The County Emergency Manager is the strategist, assigning overall tasks, while the ARES EC is the tactical person, requesting members to assist according to their talent and training. I will not need to decide if it is best to serve a volunteer fire department or county deputies, for example, but I will coordinate which operator is best and available for which place, agency, or activity.

Secondly, the EC will not have to reach out to agencies and ask to serve. We are a volunteer arm of Emergency Management and serve agencies as assigned by the EM. This does not preclude that we may train and establish working relationships with agencies other than the OEM so that, when assigned, we can work more in unison than we would with people we never met nor worked with. In some counties, Christine reports, the EC has been made Deputy Director of

Emergency Management, still a volunteer position that gives greater opportunity to serve the public in time of need.

Some of us will most probably serve at the EOC in support of dispatch.

Last, but not least, there is training. Being attached to Emergency Management opens door to a huge opportunity for emergency training at the local, state, and federal levels. The EM can authorize enrollment in a number of training courses offered by the state or national level. And I can testify to that because that is what the WILCO ARES and OEM have done for me. That is the reason of my involvement and gratitude with them and I welcome any ARES member who want to take advantage of that. Hopefully, as soon as our new EM gets settled in, he can do the very same for us here.

What do we need when serving our agencies?

1. Everyone must know exactly with whom we are dealing.
  - a. The EC must establish a relationship with the County Judge and the EC. And this goes for officers or directors as well, as the EC might not be available. We lacked that so far. I have requested a meeting with Jason with all of us: he is willing and had requested after February 15.

I also need to make sure he has our Emergency Communication Plan and the draft of our Operating Procedures, that was in the process of being evaluated by the previous EM, and that he knows of our capabilities, and, more importantly, of our limitations.

He needs to know of our policy, types of services (welfare checks, relying messages to the SOC, etc.) and of own hierarchy, such as the District Emergency Coordinator and Section Emergency Coordinator and their role in emergency response. All this is included in our documents.

- b. Likewise, the EC, the officers, and members must know the policies and the hierarchy of the agency we are serving. Whom will I interface? Who is his deputy? Who is his boss? Whom to listen in case of discrepancies? How do their policies impact our work? What other volunteer communications units will we serve, if any? All this needs to be discussed in our incoming meeting.
2. Expectations: everyone needs to know in advance what to expect during an emergency. A detailed operation plan should be developed with the served agency. We have a draft proposal on the table. We might want to review it by our next monthly meeting or before we meet with Jason. We, ARES and Agency Officials, must work jointly to establish protocols for mutual trust and respect.

Furthermore, if Blue VFD needs our communication services while there is no emergency county-wide, may we respond to them directly after permission or notification to the EM? Do we need to be assigned and respond directly only to the EM, instead? Many moving parts that need to be ironed out. Let's keep in mind that mutual trust and respect, and efficiency in response, develop only when expectations are known and fulfilled.

3. Finally, but not least, let's not exceed capabilities. A challenge ARES faces is the number of agencies that demand communications support during a disaster. A local ARES unit has only so much on the ground, and it cannot possibly meet everyone's demand. That is why we have an MOU with Williamson Co. ARES, with who we served during the latest multi-day exercise at Winter Field Day, and why we have a District EC and a Section EC to whom ask for help. Nevertheless, we need to know when to say no, and this also must be discussed, understood, and agreed upon before an emergency arises.

The ARRL maintains several formal Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with disaster and emergency response agencies including the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the National Weather Service (NWS), the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, the National Communications System and Associated Public Safety Communications Officers.

These documents are merely a framework for possible cooperation at the local level, and although they are designed to encourage mutual recognition, cooperation and coordination, they do not need to be interpreted to commit us to any of said agencies. It is always up to the local ARES to decide and coordinate. Local needs and resources available will be priorities to make decisions.

Finally, a word about competition. In many jurisdictions there is competition between ARES groups and RACES and now also AUXCOM. Each group has a reason to exist, and one does not preclude the others. ARES serves its county; RACES is state wide, for statewide emergencies and allows ARES members who are also RACES members to transmit or serve at the State Operation Center. AUXCOM groups serve state Public Safety agencies, such as DPS for example. And some counties even recruit their own independent amateur radio operators.

The best way to navigate complex situations caused by different groups, besides having ARES members being part also of the other groups, is to work to find and provide the best services we can, to strive for the growth and enhancement of ARES members' abilities and to make sure we present a professional face to our served agencies. Success will ensure that our opportunities will grow. If we can make our program better than the next guy's, the agencies will be more attracted to us.

Furthermore, setting asides egos and personalities, we can seek the other groups and take initiative to establish a relationship with them together with a common mentality of "we are all in this together." Again, with mutual respect and understanding, between us and the other groups, by serving on their teams as well, 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. That concludes tonight's training. Thank You Christine N5CAS for a thoughtful document, This is KD5BJ, back to net.

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