

## Lee County and ARES Readiness, by KD5BJ

Lee County is in the process of strengthening existing response capabilities by formalizing processes and enhancing consistency across agencies, including us ARES.

At the March 20 Table Top exercise, 42 individuals answered the call of the Judge representing the County (County Judge and other elected officials), ARES, County Emergency Coordinator, TDEM, Sheriff, Chief Deputy, and Sheriff Captain, Giddings and Lexington City Managers, Giddings and Lexington Emergency Manager Coordinators, Giddings and Lexington Police Chiefs, Giddings Deputy PD Chief, Brazos Co. IT, Computer Technologies, BlueBonnet, LCRA, Sandow Lake Power, Giddings, Lexington, and Lincoln Fire Chiefs, Lee Co. EMS, TAHC, Giddings Livestock, EP Transportation, Lee Co Petroleum-Fuel Distribution, Sage Energy, three constables, Game Warden, DPS Highway Patrol Sergeant, County Attorney, Special Assistants to Sheriff and to County Judge, and the Giddings State School.

The scenario of the Table Top Exercise was a flood in Lincoln, tornado taking down powerlines, train derailment in Dime Box with Hazmat needed from Houston, redirection of traffic from two major HWY (21 and 290) and cyberattack with ransomware.

The exercise demonstrated that Lee County personnel possess strong operational knowledge and experience. Participants responded effectively to scenario developments, coordinated across functions, and demonstrated sound judgment under simulated conditions. The responses were driven by institutional knowledge, but there was a lack of documented processes or formal playbooks. In summary:

Lee county's strength is in personnel that understand their roles and can respond efficiently.

Lee county gap is that Response actions are not standardized, documented, or easily transferable.

Consequences to this gap are as follow:

- responses inconsistent across shifts, departments, or personnel
- reduced effectiveness during high-stress or complex incidents
- Loss of capability when experience personnel are unavailable
- Limited ability in training new staff or scale operations
- Lack of documentation in After Action Report and continuous improvement.

These consequences, as we know already because we discussed them several times, affects us, too, within us, but also in relation to other County agencies.

The recommended approach are the playbooks. The main instructor has prepared them for us a few months ago based on our Emcomm Plan. All ARES members should have them in their mail box and we will discuss those at our next meeting this coming Sunday.

Recommended phases during a response include:

- Awareness and Detection
- Triage and Initial assessment (identify priorities)
- Notification and Escalation (how we escalate our response)
- Command and Coordination (aligned with ICS and NIMS principles. I highly recommend that we review those in our FEMA trainings. I highly recommend those who lack ICS 300 and 400 – in class training- to please take those. These raining make all the difference.
- Response Action
- Recovery
- After Action Report that becomes basis for the next exercise or training.

Incident-specific playbooks

**For the County:**

Initial playbook priorities may include:

- Cyber Incident/Ransomware
- Utility or Power Disruption
- Natural Disaster
- Communications Failure
- Critical Infrastructure Disruption

Each playbook should include:

- Activation triggers
- Key risks and considerations
- Priority actions
- Coordination requirements
- Decision points
- Communication guidance

**For ARES:**

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- Playbook A – Severe Weather/Natural Disaster
- Playbook B - Physical Disturbance/Riot/Civil Unrest (ARES remains communications-only; no security duties, which, as we discussed, poses a problem of shadowing First Responders in dangerous situations.)
- Playbook C: Power Outage / Communications Infrastructure Failure
- Playbook D: Cascading Event Response

Each playbooks contains trigger events, initial actions, sustained operations, Recovery and demob, coordination tasks, logistics and resupply tasks, and key risks.

The County is recommended to engage the TDEM CLO, Wayne Arnold for training. I think we should, too, and Wayne told me at the last CERT meeting that he was available to help us.

**Next Steps** for County and us ARES:

1. Capture and formalize our strong foundation and experience into a structured, repeatable system. Making sure that if a key person is not reachable, others can take his or her place.
2. Implement a core response process supported by the playbooks, Lee County, with ARES, can then transition from experience-driven response to a sustainable, scalable, and resilient emergency management capability.

The County will organize the groups who participated in the table top in smaller groups according to the issue to create these playbooks and then we, meaning each agency including us, will integrate again to work together.

The plan would be for the County to reach out to adjacent counties to invite them to do the similar tabletop exercises within their own county and then to work together with us Lee Co., because the same disaster will affect several counties in different ways.

And here is the sober reminder for us ARES, that we know well, but visitors might not: When communications go down or are unreliable, we do not offer backup emergency communications. We are the primary and only communication that the county, cities, and public will have. And we are 12 active members serving some 15 elected officials, 15 deputies, 30 Giddings PD, 9 VFD 990?), etc etc. ...

A word on the Instructors:

- Rob Dodson, US Army veteran who retired as an Army Chief Intelligence Warrant Officer, and Army Certified Instructor and Course Developer being also an Adjunct Instructor for the National Security Agency (NSA), a career spanning 27 years. During his service, Rob was a Communications Intelligence Analyst conducting network exploitation in Offensive, Defensive, and Management Cyber Operations roles.
- Cindy McClister (Certified Scrum Master) has 20 years of experience, specialized in designing customized training programs for the U.S. Air Force, U.S. Army, and Special Operations Units, equipping them with the skills needed to safeguard the Nation's Global Information Grid (GIG).

Net control this was just a quick summary of four documents of AAR and 5 or 6 hours exercise of what happened and came from the table top exercise on March 20, 2026.

This is KD5BJ, back to net.