

Maine Emergency Communications Course

LEVEL 1

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What is my job??

Your job in ARES is to **supplement** communications on behalf of served agencies. You are not there to fight a fire or assist in traffic control; The agencies that you serve for communications will handle operations.

Do not approach the scene as if you were in charge. Understand your place in the Incident Command System and make sure you are a benefit and not a hinderance.

Different people will have different specialties. A firefighter knows how to properly stop a fire or prevent it from spreading and a amateur radio operator knows how to send formal traffic and understands how radiowave propagation works. Having a radio operator with a fire hose and a firefighter with a radiogram form would have an unfavorable result.

What is the structure of ARES??

ARES is divided into 4 sections: National, Section, District and Local, with most of the activity occurring at the **local** level. The local level usually is usually comprised at a county level, although some larger, metropolitan areas may have their own ARES group. The local level is overseen by the **Emergency Coordinator (EC)** who is Cory Golob (N1URA) for Androscoggin County. Our **District Emergency Coordinator (DEC)** Bill Akins (NT1N) oversees Lincoln, Androscoggin, Kennebec and Franklin counties. The **Section Emergency Coordinator (SEC)** for Maine is Bryce Rummery (K1GAX) who in turn reports to the American Radio Relay League.

ARES or RACES??

The best answer is both, however, while dual membership is recommended, it is not necessary. To say that one is more flexible than the other is not entirely true. Comparing ARES to RACES is like comparing a Cortland to a Granny Smith... while they both serve the *same* purpose, they each have a *unique* flair. The important division between the two emergency communication groups is that one (RACES) is affiliated with governmental agencies like EMA whereas the other (ARES) is affiliated with non-government agencies like the American Red Cross.

I'm Ready For My Closeup Mr. Deville!

While people may want their 30 seconds of fame, we, as amateur radio operators must know our place. The media should be forwarded to the **Public Information Officer (PIO)**. From our position we may only know limited information whereas the PIO is receiving information from a wider variety of resources. Also, a person is liable for what they say so it is better to defer this responsibility. If the media is showing up for mass casualty incident, they are interested in the actual incident. If, however, the media was interested in *how* amateur radio is used to help in the coordination of rescue efforts, then we may be able to offer some words of encouragement, but even then you should refer the media to the PIO within the amateur radio command system.

How helpful are simulations??

exercise While simulations do not give you the same feel as a real emergency, they are excellent training grounds for fine tuning your skills. It is much better to practice, practice and practice to work out any bugs in the communication system so that when an emergency arises, operators are **better prepared**. Simulations also allow people to concentrate on certain aspects within amateur radio without having to go through a full-blown scenario. If your group wanted to practice the etiquette of running a formal net and give people the opportunity to act as net control or alternate net control, the requests and traffic being passed during the net, while still important, becomes secondary.

Types of Nets

Nets can be divided into two categories: **Formal** and **Informal**. Emergency situations deal with formal nets, which is also considered a **directed** net where a net control station acts as ringmaster coordinating who comes into the net, who leaves the net and authorizing who can contact whom and on what frequency. While the task can be tedious, the more a person acts as net control, the easier it truly becomes.

Tactical and Traffic nets are also widely used in emergency situations. Swap nets or Talk ("Ragchew") nets are considered informal and have no place in emergency communications since the format is not structured.

How often do I identify in an emergency??

An emergency situation does not change the rules on how frequently you identify your station. It may sound like you are identifying yourself more often because you are! Remember, a person identifies themselves once every 10 minutes, at the beginning of contact with a station and at the end of contact with a station. The turnaround on contacting people is much more frequent in an emergency whereas when we are casually chatting on an everyday basis, our conversations are longer and identification usually only happens at the 10-minute mark.

Traffic Handling

If there is only one thing to remember about traffic handling it is to **pass traffic exactly as written**. Never correct a message while it is being copied. Upon receipt and acknowledgement of the message you can *offer* advice on a correction through a service message to the originating station, but do not change the contents of the original message, even if you believe or know its contents to be wrong. The message could read: "One Plus One Equals Three" and that is exactly how it should be passed.

Workmen's Comp will cover me... right??

In a word... NO. The answer actually depends on the agency: Some agencies will cover a volunteer and other agencies will not. **Do not assume you will automatically be covered.** Be sure to inquire about this with the proper contact person.

Whose safety is top priority??

While the bystanders in need of help are definitely a priority, they are not the top priority. You are of no good to anyone if you are not able to get to your designated area safely. Always keep your own safety as the number one safety priority.

Ready Kits

When an emergency arises is not the time to start packing a "ready-kit". It is called "ready-kit" because it is ready to go! Go kits are part of the pre-planning process. This will save time in a true emergency. You should also review your "ready-kit" every few months to make sure everything is fully stocked and up-to-date. The last thing you would want in an emergency is the batteries in your "go-kit" dead and the radio frequencies outdated. Needs may also change over time and you may find that items need to either be added or removed from your kit.

Attitude is Everything!!!

How you conduct yourself not only shows what kind of person you are, but also what kind of agency you serve. A positive attitude leads to increased productivity and a better working environment.