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Use of Amateur Radio Operators to Augment Emergency Communications: Amateur Radio Operator Points of Contact (POCs)

PURPOSE

Emergency management agencies seeking to integrate amateur radio operators into emergency management communications should establish POCs with the major amateur radio organizations that can support emergency communications.

SUMMARY

Emergency management agencies should establish relationships with existing amateur radio organizations through a designated POC. These amateur radio organizations can assist agencies during emergencies by providing auxiliary communications capabilities to local responders.

DESCRIPTION

In order to successfully integrate amateur radio organizations into an emergency communications structure, emergency managers need to identify and establish a relationship with an experienced amateur radio operator in their area to serve as a POC. Emergency managers should seek out POCs from one of the major amateur radio organizations that specialize in emergency communications.

Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Services (RACES) is a volunteer organization of licensed amateur radio operators who provide communications to state and local government agencies during emergencies. RACES units are organized and administered at the state and local levels by civil defense or emergency management agencies and serve as official auxiliary communications systems for their supervisory government agency. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides planning and technical assistance to state and local agencies to establish and integrate RACES units into communications protocols. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulations outline the specific operational and technical details for RACES communications.

A state or local emergency management agency (EMA) can organize its own RACES unit from the bottom up, can develop a non-governmental amateur radio operator unit (e.g. ARES units) into a RACES unit, or can integrate existing RACES units into an emergency management communications system. To develop a non-governmental radio operator unit into a RACES unit or to incorporate an existing RACES unit, the state or local EMA should reach the POC from the nearest local or state amateur

When establishing a RACES unit, FEMA regulations require that the director or a designated representative of the state or local EMA or emergency operations center (EOC) appoint, in writing, a RACES officer.

The responsibilities of the RACES Officer are:
- To serve as a liaison between the RACES unit and the EMA/EOC; and
- To recruit other amateur radio operators into the RACES unit.

radio emergency communications group. This POC can help the EMA coordinate other amateur radio operators in the area.

Amateur Radio Emergency Services (ARES) is a group of FCC-licensed amateur radio operators who volunteer their services and equipment to public or private agencies during emergencies. ARES units can perform similar emergency communications functions as RACES units, but ARES units are not governed by the FCC's technical RACES guidelines or FEMA's operational RACES guidelines.

ARES units operate under the auspices of the American Radio Relay League (ARRL), a national, not-for-profit organization. The ARRL is a recognized affiliate program with the Department of Homeland Security's Citizen Corps initiative and is a member of the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (NVOAD).

A state or local EMA, or any other public safety organization, can incorporate ARES units into emergency communications systems. To incorporate an ARES unit, the EMA should contact the nearest ARRL section manager who can coordinate with other amateur radio operators in the area.

SKYWARN is a group of individuals that monitor and relay local weather information either to the National Weather Service or to EMAs to help warn communities of impending natural disasters, such as tornados and other severe weather incidents. Weather spotters can identify emergencies and activate sirens or broadcast emergency information in advance, improving warning and response times.

To establish a relationship with weather spotters, emergency managers should contact their local SKYWARN group.

> Some amateur radio units are double- or triple-listed as RACES, ARES, and SKYWARN units

In addition to RACES, ARES, and SKYWARN, several other national amateur radio organizations can assist in emergency management communications.

Salvation Army Team Emergency Radio Network (SATERN) provides amateur radio operators to both incident scenes and relief-distribution sites during emergencies. SATERN was created as a communications system primarily for Salvation Army operations, but through agreements with EMAs, SATERN operators can assist in allocating resources, managing donations, feeding and housing volunteers, and communicating with the families of victims.

To establish a relationship with Salvation Army radio operators, emergency managers should contact their local SATERN group.

Military Affiliated Radio System (MARS) is sponsored by the Department of Defense under the authority of DoD Directive 4605.2. MARS supplements emergency communications locally, nationally, and internationally by using both military radio operators and volunteer radio operators of the US Amateur Radio Service. MARS provides auxiliary communications for military, federal, civil, and/or disaster officials in emergencies, and assists in restoring normal communications in emergencies through use of its unique set of frequency allocations covering all 50 states and US territories.

Emergency managers can request MARS support for emergency communications by contacting the state MARS director.