

Amateur Radio and Emergency Communications

WHO does EMCOM ??? Or ... Alphabet Soup 101

ARES, RACES, ACS, MCARCS, NTS, ??? What are they - how are they different ??

ARRL Field Organization:

The **American Radio Relay League** is the national organization of amateur radio operators. It has been in operation since the second decade of the 20th Century. The ARRL has a **Field Organization** which aligns with their geographical structure (National, Divisional, Section, Local). ARRL elect their Divisional and Section leaders.

National Traffic System NTS - a structured method of passing traffic. This is the root of the Field Organization.

Amateur Radio Emergency Service ARES - a structured way of recruiting, registering, training operators for emergency communications and leading the group in responses. Each local group is lead by an Emergency Coordinator who is appointed by the ARRL Section Emergency Coordinator. The typical ARES clients are those with national memoranda of understanding with ARRL.

[American Red Cross](#)

[National Weather Service](#) Skywarn-tornado watch.

[Department of Homeland Security -- Citizen Corps \(FEMA\)](#)

[Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials-International](#)

[National Communications System](#)

[National Association of Radio and Telecommunications Engineers, Inc.](#)

[Salvation Army](#)

[Society of Broadcast Engineers](#)

[Quarter Century Wireless Association, Inc.](#)

[Radio Emergency Associated Communication Teams](#)

[Civil Air Patrol \(CAP\)](#)

[United States Power Squadrons](#)

Until relatively recently ARES had no governmental clients and typically did not operate during declared disasters. Public Service has always been the major agenda for ARES. Not all ARES groups support all the ARES clients. Frequency groups specialize with the Red Cross, Salvation Army, Skywarn or other. Full text of the various MOUs are available on www.arrl.org.

FCC Regulations - Part 97

Part 97 provides for the **Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service or RACES**. Organizations of amateur radio operators organized under general purpose government agencies to register, train, drill, and respond. RACES operators become unpaid resources to the registering agency. Having its roots firmly set in 1950's era Civil Defense, RACES organizations today are frequently found at State, County, City or special district levels. Frequently found under law enforcement, fire and other emergency response agencies. Operators in RACES typically are subject to background checks. They are provided with workman's compensation insurance when they are activated. RACES organizations are lead by a Radio Officer who provides direct liaison to the governmental client.

RACES organizations commonly come to be when an ARES organization develops and signs a Memorandum of Understanding with a general purpose government agency. Members are said to be cross registered. In an event, the responders begin under their ARES structure, then when a disaster is declared they can continue operating to benefit their government client. In a disaster the RACES operators conduct operations in behalf of their governmental client.

Auxiliary Communications Service – ACS

In an effort to modernize their volunteer support organization, California and some other states have adopted the Auxiliary Communications Service as their volunteer communications support operators. Their mission is broader than just using amateur radio to support the client.

“The Auxiliary Communications Services (ACS) is what we, in California, call all communications-related volunteer organizations. This is not just a euphemism for RACES. ACS is a program identifier of RACES, ARES, REACT, CAP, MARS, RCU, DCS and any other volunteer-based telecommunications organization. ACS is a part of California's Citizen Corps/AmeriCorps Program called California Volunteers.

The ACS model has been adopted by Sonoma County's Department of Emergency Service. This is the organization through which they support volunteer communications support to government agencies. There is an MOU between Sonoma County OES/ACS and the ARRL/ARES defining the roles to be fulfilled by each.

There are ARES organizations in some of the cities in Sonoma County. At this time there is no ARES organization on the coast.

The Sonoma County ACS is lead by a County appointed volunteer Radio Officer, Ken, KE6N. Sonoma County ACS supports several repeaters.

The County is divided into six geographic Units:

North County, Central County, South County,
Coast, Russian River, Sonoma Valley

Each Unit is lead by a Unit Leader and Assistant Unit Leader (s)

ACS Operators are recruited locally, registered by the County following Level I Training. Operators are required to complete Incident Command System Training. Additional Training in NCS operations and traffic handling are included as Level II Training. The photo ID issued by Sonoma County ACS is a Disaster Service Worker ID and members are covered by Workman's Compensation Insurance when activated.

Mendocino County Amateur Radio Communications Service

The MCARCS organization is relatively new. Their founding document is available on line at: www.mcarcs.org. Drawing from it, MCARCS

States their mission is to

- Help residents report critical safety conditions and to provide
- Communications services to public safety organizations
- Communications services to public agencies
- Communications services to private agencies (Red Cross, Salvation Army...)
- Communications services to volunteer organizations (CERT)
- Communications to aid in locating lost individuals and related information

Areawide nets operated weekly. Local nets to be organized. Training appears to be through participation in nets.

After participation in 3 months of nets, operators are eligible to receive an Mendocino County OES ID. Applications for ID qualifies an operator to be sworn in as a Disaster Service Workers.

The document clearly states that MCARCS is not affiliated with ARES, RACES, ACS, and is not a club.

The document states that MCARCS is recognized by Mendocino County.

MCARCS is 'governed by consensus at monthly meetings of the steering committee'.

General Features of Emergency Communications Groups:

Characteristic	ARES	RACES	ACS	MCARCS
Registration	Y	Y	Y	Y
Defined Leadership	Y - EC	Y - RO	Y - RO	N - consensus
Background Check	Sometimes	Y	Y	?
Op Training	Y	Y	Y	?
Client Planning	Y	Y	Y	?
Client Liaison	Y	Y	Y	N
Public Service	Y	Some	Some	?
Emergency Role	Emerging	Y	Y	?
Part 97 Authority	N	Y	Y	N
DSW ID	N	Y	Y	Y?
Workman's Comp	N	Y	Y	Y?