

“Being Pulled Every Which Way But Loose”

I believe that one of the largest challenges that all or at least most ARES/RACES organizations face is the number of agencies that demand communications support during a disaster. A local ARES/RACES unit only has so much to go around, and it can't possibly meet every agency's needs.

While the ARRL maintains several formal Memoranda of Understanding with disaster and emergency response agencies including the Federal Emergency Management Agency, National Weather Service, Red Cross, Salvation Army, National Communications System, and Associated Public Safety Communications Officers, these documents merely set forth a framework for possible cooperation at the local level. While they are designed to encourage mutual recognition, cooperation and coordination, they should not be interpreted as to commit, obligate or mandate in any way that an ARES/RACES unit must serve a particular agency, or meet all of its needs, in a jurisdiction. MOUs are "door openers." to help you get your foot in the door, that's all. It's up to our Section leadership, our ARES/RACES leadership and members to decide whether or not to pursue a local operational plan with an agency, and that decision should be based on a number of factors including the local needs of the agency and the resources you have available to support those needs, given that you may have other prioritized commitments as well.

To address this, we need to sit down with our fellow ARES/RACES members, EC, DEC and SEC, and determine what agencies are active in our area, evaluate each of their needs, and which ones we are capable of meeting. Then prioritize these agencies and their needs.

Given the above, however, we should also be working for growth in our ARES/RACES program, making it stronger, making it a more valuable resource and hence able to meet more of the agencies' local needs. There are many of the new Technicians coming into the amateur service now that would make ideal additions to an ARES/RACES roster. They're ripe for picking for an active ARES/RACES program! A stronger ARES/RACES unit means a better ability to serve our communities in times of need and a greater sense of pride for Amateur Radio by both amateurs and the public. That's good for all of us.

As we have discussed previously, considering the number of amateurs in the USA, there is only a small pool of Amateurs who are interested in emergency communications so it is important that we reach out for all the new people we can. One of the goals of the “Arkansas Section Traffic Emergency Net” is to reach the people who are not participating in ARES/RACES because no one has reached out to them or they think they can't add value because they have no training. The three main reasons why people think they would not be useful are:

1. They do not own a radio, or only own a hand held.
2. Lack technical skills. (I guess they think everyone else has these skills)
3. Have little or no radio operating experience and no training.

Folks, there are three basic things we all need to remember:

1. Without planning, training and practice, any Amateur is just a volunteer with a radio.
2. Amateur radio emergency communications is a team event and like any team there are numerous skills required and most are non-technical; so that say's "**Teamwork** divides the effort and multiplies the effect."
3. Emergency communications requires pre-planned, tested & practiced solutions that meet client needs and that our clients can depend on.