

Amateur Radio in Emergency Communications

BACKGROUND: The U.S. Congress enacted the Communications Act of 1934 and created the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to execute and enforce the provisions of The Act. The FCC Rules, which implement The Act, provide for licensing of operators and regulates the Amateur Radio Service in Part 97 and states that the Amateur Radio Service is a “voluntary, non-commercial communications service, particularly with respect to providing emergency communications”.

RADIO AMATEUR CIVIL EMERGENCY SERVICE (RACES)

Part 97 of the FCC Rules defines the Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service(RACES) as a separate service, which “provides for amateur radio operation for civil defense communications, during periods of local, regional or national civil emergencies, including any emergency which may necessitate invoking of the President’s War Emergency Powers under the provisions of Section 606 of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended”. It also provides restrictions in the duration to RACES drills.

Under the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) guidance, State and County governments have developed Departments of Emergency Management (DEM.), which are responsible for planning local and regional response to a wide range of emergencies.

In actual practice, utilization of RACES has evolved such that the Service has, in many cases, become an integral part of local emergency plans. At the County level, the DEM. appoints an amateur radio operator to serve as Radio Officer, coordinating the amateur radio response to an emergency and serves as liaison to the Amateur Radio community. Licensed amateur radio operators are recruited to register as RACES Emergency Workers, as provided for by the Washington Administrative Code 118-04 and under conditions set fourth by the DEM. RACES, however, does not have any organized State or National support structure until activated.

AMATEUR RADIO EMERGENCY SERVICE (ARES)

The American Radio Relay League (ARRL) is the National organization of Amateur Radio. To aid in providing emergency communications, the ARRL has created a Field Organization of volunteers which administer a National Traffic System (NTS) and an Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES). The ARRL has Memoranda of Understandings with the following public safety and disaster relief organizations.

- The American National Red Cross
- The Salvation Army
- The Association of Public Safety Communications Officers
- The National Communication System
- The National Weather Service
- The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

Washington State is in the Northwest Division and presided over by an elected Director and Vice Director. The Director serves on the Board of Directors of the ARRL and assists in setting League policy. The Northwest Division is divided into six Sections.

The elected Western Washington Section Leader appoints an ARES Section Emergency Coordinator (SEC), who in turn recommends the appointment of District 2 (Clallam and Jefferson Counties) Emergency Coordinator (DEC). The Emergency Coordinator (EC) for Clallam County is recommended by both the DEC and SEC.

Emergency Coordinators (EC) are responsible for all activities at the local, usually a County, level. The EC and above positions are required to maintain current membership in the ARRL.

To assist at the local level the Emergency Coordinator can select Assistant Emergency Coordinators (AEC) to serve in functional or geographic roles, as required. The Emergency Coordinator also makes recommendations to the ARRL for designations of Official Emergency Stations.

A REGIONAL OVERVIEW

WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

The Washington Department of Emergency Management, recently reorganized under the Washington Military Department (National Guard), is responsible for coordinating response to disasters within the State and with FEMA for Federal assets and recovery funding. At the State level there is a Washington State Radio Officer.

PENINSULA REGIONAL EMERGENCY PLAN (PREP)

It is the responsibility of Government to preserve lives, protect property and ensure public health in times of natural or man-made disasters, and to take the action necessary to mitigate the effects of such disasters to the extent possible. All Counties, of the State of Washington, and their political subdivisions, the Cities of Sequim, Port Angeles and Forks, are required by Chapter 38.52 of the Revised Code of Washington to have a disaster plan.

The Peninsula Regional Emergency Plan is a cooperative effort of Clallam County and the Cities of Sequim, Port Angeles and Forks, and the member agencies and organizations of the Peninsula Regional Emergency Planning Council. The Council members realize that disasters do not recognize jurisdictional boundaries and the needs of the community in crisis can be met more effectively if there is the coordinated application of combined resources. This regional concept attempts to establish a framework where all the jurisdictions can work together in a single, cooperative, coordinated effort to reduce human suffering.

The cities of Sequim (Zone 1), Port Angeles (Zone 2) and Forks (Zone 3) each maintain an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to respond to emergencies in the Zone in which they reside. The County operates an EOC for the coordination of assets and resources between the city and County, within the Zone; between Zones; and from the State or federal resources. The County has responsibility for the towns of Clallam Bay and Sekiu in Zone 4. The Makah at Neah Bay, the Lower Elwha, and Jamestown S'Klallam have the responsibility on Tribal lands and are members of the PREP Council.

The Incident Command System (ICS) is used to coordinate the response and recovery to emergencies and disasters. Under that system an Incident Commander takes charge and, depending on the locality and extent of the incident, the Emergency Operating Centers are activated. This may involve one city's EOC, it may cause activation of both a City and the County EOCs or it may be so extensive that all City, County and State EOCs are activated. An EOC may activate to a "level one" for low level monitoring of a developing situation, such as to monitor river flows, and escalate as the need develops or to immediately activate to a higher level to respond to immediate and disastrous

incidents. Level 2 results in EOC activation.

During these incidents normal public safety communication paths typically become overloaded and the coordination of response requires additional communications that often can not be economically provided and maintained on a standby basis. This is when the communications equipment and knowledge of volunteer amateur radio operators is a valuable asset to the community.

CLALLAM COUNTY AMATEUR RADIO EMERGENCY SERVICE (ARES®)

Clallam County ARES is organized as an affiliate of ARRL/ARES and recognized by Clallam County EMD as its RACES organization, to train and facilitate amateur radio operators response to provide auxiliary communications during emergencies and to provide alternate non-commercial communications service.

Members in good standing are registered with Clallam County EMD and who issues a Washington State Emergency Worker Card. under provisions of the WAC 118-04 in the event of an emergency.

In Clallam County, the EMD has appointed the ARRL/ARES Emergency Coordinator to be the County's RACES Radio Officer, vesting both positions in the same person to insure consistency. The EC/RO appoints Zone ECs (AECs) for each of the four Zones of Clallam County's Peninsula Regional Emergency Plan and several AEC functional positions, among them is an AEC-Red Cross, who is also appointed by the Red Cross as their Communications Coordinator.

When activated by the EMD. for training drills or an emergency, and an Incident Number is issued by the County, registered amateur radio operators serve as unpaid employees and are covered by Worker's Compensation Insurance. When activated for non-EMD. events ARES amateur radio operators provide non-commercial communications services for the American Red Cross and other non-profit groups such as walk-a-thons, bicycle events, etc. These can be covered as training events at the discretion of the EMD. The organization acts as the community's single point of contact to the County and Cities, for coordination of Amateur Radio volunteer responders.