

Updated and Approved 10/13/2010

## District 14 A.R.E.S.® North West Unit Amateur Radio Emergency Service

# EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

## 1. INTRODUCTION

**1.1** The North West Harris County Amateur Radio Emergency Service (NW HC ARES) is a field organization of the American Radio Relay League (ARRL). It is composed principally of FCC licensed amateur radio operators who are trained emergency communicators, volunteering their personal time, skill and equipment, to serve in the public interest. (see the appendix at the end of this document for membership requirements) In accordance with the ARRL policy concerning Field Service volunteers, NW HC ARES complies with their rules governing the acceptance and termination of these volunteers. (see the appendix at the end of this document) NW HC ARES is focused on providing service to the North West Unit of Harris County Texas. The boundaries of this area are the Harris-Montgomery county line to the North, Interstate 45 to the East, Interstate 10 to the South, and the Harris-Waller county line to the West. These are approximate boundaries, and amateur radio operators living within or near them are eligible for participation with NW HC ARES.

Part 97.1 Basis and purpose.

The rules and regulations in Part 97.1 are designed to provide an amateur radio service having a fundamental purpose as expressed in the following principles:

1.1.1 Regulation and enhancement of the value of the Amateur Radio Service to the public as a voluntary non-commercial communications service, particularly with respect to providing emergency communications. [Emphasis added]

**1.2** The NW HC ARES functions in this Emergency Communications Plan under the direction of the ARES Emergency Coordinator (EC), District Emergency Coordinator (DEC), and the Section Emergency Coordinator (SEC). The EC is appointed by the Section Manager for the South Texas Section of the American Radio Relay League (ARRL), and depends upon the support of amateur radio clubs.

**1.3** The EC may appoint Assistant Emergency Coordinators (AECs) as needed.

**1.4** The EC may appoint Duty Officers (DOs), who have the primary duty to activate NW Harris County ARES when needed. Duty Officers may be any competent member of NW HC ARES.

**1.5** When activated, the EC or DO performing the activation will become the ARES Officer In Charge (OIC), or will designate an OIC. The OIC will be the final authority within NW Harris County ARES for that emergency incident or public service event.

## 2. PURPOSE

**2.1** The purpose of this plan is to provide a written guide containing the minimum information needed in an emergency. Each emergency incident is different and flexibility is necessary to provide an adequate response.

**2.1.1** Where conflict may exist between this Emergency Plan, the Harris County Emergency Plan and/or the South Texas Section Emergency Plan, the South Texas Section Emergency Plan will take precedence and the District 14 Emergency Plan and

the Northwest Harris County plan will be subordinate plans.

**2.2** The primary responsibility of the NW HC ARES is to furnish emergency communications in the event of a natural or man made emergency when regular communications fail, become inadequate, or overloaded.

**2.3** Periodic instruction, training and drills shall be carried out to ensure readiness to respond quickly in providing effective amateur emergency communications.

**2.4** The following is a list of jurisdictions, government and non-profit agencies that will be served, as requested, in an emergency. Other city, county or state agencies will be served as requested by the emergency management of Harris County.

2.4.1 Incorporated cities in Harris County.

2.4.2 The total area and population under the authority of the Harris County Judge and the Harris County Office of Emergency Management.

2.4.3 The American Red Cross

2.4.4 Law enforcement, fire departments, and emergency medical services

2.4.5 Hospitals and nursing homes

2.4.6 Requests for mutual aid assistance from other ARES organizations as approved by the SEC of the South Texas Section of the ARRL

2.4.7 The State of Texas Division of Emergency Management

2.4.8 The Federal Emergency Management Agency

2.4.9 The Salvation Army

**2.5** NW Harris County ARES may provide communications support at public events conducted by nonprofit organizations in non-emergency situations.

**2.6** NW Harris County ARES should support the Skywarn program of the National Weather Service (NWS), when weather conditions warrant. A request from a served agency is not required for Skywarn support.

### **3. PLAN ACTIVATION**

**3.1** Any member of the NW HC ARES who becomes aware that a **communications emergency exists**, should contact the EC, a Duty Officer, or an Assistant EC, then monitor the primary VHF net frequency of 146.66 MHz(-) (141.3 Hz) for activity. Backup frequencies are: 147.300 (+) (151.4 Hz) repeater, 147.30 MHz(+) (151.4 Hz) repeater, 147.20 MHz (+) repeater and 146.44 MHz simplex. **During an event, there will be an informational net on 147.00(+)(103.5 Hz) and/or 444.600(+)(103.5 Hz). The purpose of this net will be information pertaining to the event and check-ins may or may not be taken. Stations should remain silent unless invited to transmit.**

**3.2** NW HC ARES members are prohibited from going to the site of any emergency incident unless authorized to do so by Net Control. Net Control will only authorize operators to go to the site of an emergency incident if the appropriate served agency requests ARES help at that site.

**The request, requester name, title, served agency, and time should be documented in the net log.**

NOTE: Currently mobile units may stage near the affected area, in the parking lots of pre-defined staging areas, which are HEB grocery stores and Wal-Mart stores.

**3.3** The EC, a designated Duty Officer, or an Assistant EC shall be notified by telephone or pager. Other methods, including amateur radio or courier, may be used if needed.

**3.4** In any emergency in which amateur radio is requested to serve, NW HC ARES may be alerted by any emergency management coordinator, Red Cross, or state official notifying the EC or a Duty Officer. If the EC and Duty Officers are unavailable, an AEC should be contacted. The AEC will periodically attempt to contact the EC and a Duty Officer. The EC or a Duty Officer who activates ARES will become the ARES Officer In Charge (OIC). The ARES OIC will document the name, title, and served agency of the requester.

**3.5** The ARES OIC will be in charge of all ARES operations during any emergency activation. He/she will be the top North West Harris County ARES authority for the event. All ARES participants will take direction from him/her. The OIC may change during the event at the discretion of the OIC or EC.

#### **4. MOBILIZATION**

**4.1** The OIC or designee will first notify NW HC ARES members by any means necessary.

**4.2** If required to accomplish necessary staffing for the emergency, the OIC, or designee, will transmit on each VHF 144-148 MHz and UHF 420-450 MHz repeater, in the NW HC ARES sector, advising all stations of the ARES activation. Internet e-mail may also be used, but only in addition to all other methods being attempted.

**4.3** Upon notification that a communications emergency exists, members of the NW Harris County Amateur Radio Emergency Service will listen to the net control frequency and will only check in if they have urgent information or when the Net Control Station (NCS) asks for check-ins on the NW Harris County Emergency Net. Stations will maintain radio silence, unless they have business with the net.

**4.4** The highest staffing priority in any emergency incident will be given first to those amateurs registered with the NW HC ARES. Second priority will be members of other ARES or RACES groups. Third priority will be amateur radio operators not associated with any ARES or RACES group. Assignments will be given to minimize the travel distance.

**4.5** Before any member volunteers, they must ensure that your family is safe and taken care of.

#### **5. DUTIES OF NET CONTROL AND DEPLOYED STATIONS**

**5.1** OPENING NETS - The North West Harris County Emergency Net will be activated by the Net Control Station, upon instructions from the OIC. Based upon the facts, stations will be advised as to the nature of the emergency. Net Control will establish and announce backup frequencies and a backup Net Control station. As appropriate, Net Control will periodically announce that a net is in progress, give brief summaries, and remind users of backup frequencies and backup Net Control, etc.

5.1.1 Normally, a minimum of one directed net is required, the Operations Net, and it is conducted on the primary repeater frequency, if it is operational. If it is not operating, initially use the repeater output, or primary simplex frequency of 146.44 MHz (see 3.1).

5.1.2 If necessary, as determined by the incident OIC, additional directed nets may be activated on alternate frequencies (see 3.1) or any available VHF simplex frequencies (144.90-145.10, 146.40-146.58, 147.42-147.57 MHz): resource or logistics – identify and assign stations and equipment administration net – coordinate activities of all other nets medical net – coordinate first aid or other medical responders, including ambulances traffic net – coordinate movement of formal written messages, including NTS liaison if necessary

5.1.3 Liaison stations to South Texas Section HF emergency and traffic nets may be required. These nets normally operate on the following frequencies: emergency & tactical traffic day: 7285 kHz night: 3873 kHz H&W traffic day: 7290 kHz night: 3935 kHz

**5.2 CHECK-IN STATIONS** - Stations will be checked in from their home stations, mobiles, and portable stations. After they check in, all stations shall stand-by on an assigned frequency for further instructions. An inventory list will be made of operators and their equipment for possible assignment.

**5.3** Mobile and portable stations will be dispatched as needed either to a "staging" location or directly to the incident site as determined by the OIC. OIC must notify NCS which agency official, by name and title, requested our deployment. This is in case any deployed units encounter a restricted access situation or other challenges. The exact location of each deployed station will be maintained by the NCS.

**5.4** Each incident site will have a designated Amateur Radio Team Leader who will coordinate amateur communication at their specific deployment site. This will usually be the first amateur to arrive at that site.

5.4.1 Be prepared to be refused entry to the area. Do not attempt to enter the area unless specifically approved to do so by the supervisor. Do not represent yourself as a Red Cross (or other agency) worker unless you are specifically on Red Cross (or other agency) business. Be courteous! If you are denied entry, notify Net Control and wait for further instructions.

5.4.2 Upon arrival at the incident site, identify yourself to the location's supervisor. Make sure any relief operators are also introduced, and ask the location supervisor to do the same.

5.4.3 Upon entry to the site, set up your equipment and get on the air as quickly as possible. Try to locate near the "action" but stay out of other's way. Start a chronological log of operations, recording all messages and other events affecting communications and/or station operation.

Check into the Operations Net, or other net as instructed.

5.4.4 Do not divulge information nor express opinions to any individual, particularly the media.

Refer all questions to the site's public information officer.

**5.5** If any requested action involves unacceptable risk, the person should NOT take the action. Upon refusal, the person should notify the net control station that he/she will not be performing the requested action, along with a brief statement of their risk assessment.

## 6. OPERATIONS

### 6.1 MESSAGES

6.1.1 Formal Messages: Formal messages are those that are written in a standard format. All messages that request material or services, which may require payment or replacement, must be formal messages. Message Forms: All formal messages must be written in standard ICS format, unless otherwise directed by the served agency. It is strongly encouraged to restrict messages to 25 words or less, particularly if the message will be relayed multiple times or sent out of the area. Messages over 25 words are much less likely to reach their destination quickly. Operators receiving messages from officials should encourage the officials to produce messages in 25 words or less to ensure prompt and reliable delivery. The served agency representative can create his/her printed message on the Message Forms provided by the radio operator for that purpose.

Message Precedence: The operator must assign the message an ARRL PRECEDENCE, defined on ARRL CD Form 3. This PRECEDENCE will be used on all messages. Any operator receiving messages should check the precedence of messages received for EMERGENCY precedence messages. Anyone giving messages to an operator should check the messages and inform the operator if any of the messages are of EMERGENCY precedence. The person passing the messages should be sure the receiving operator acknowledges this precedence. Requester name: All FORMAL MESSAGES require the PRINTED NAME, TITLE, SERVED AGENCY and SITE of the requester. All requests to send ARES operators to a location require PRINTED NAME, TITLE, SERVED AGENCY and SITE of the requester. These requests should be written down in the net log.

MESSAGES RECEIVED REQUESTING MATERIALS OR SERVICES, WHICH MAY LATER REQUIRE PAYMENT or REPAYMENT OF FUNDS WILL NOT BE TRANSMITTED UNTIL THEY CONTAIN THE PRINTED NAME, TITLE, SERVED AGENCY AND SITE OF THE REQUESTER.

Save Messages: All operators must save a copy of all formal messages.

#### 6.1.2 Tactical Messages

Tactical emergency messages, such as FIRE, POLICE or Life-or-Death situations do NOT require numbers. These are the highest priority messages. Get the attention of the NCS between transmissions by giving your tactical call sign and saying "emergency traffic." Example: "Shelter Two emergency traffic." When accepting such messages for transmission, require only the following information:

- A. To (Example: Cy Fair Fire Department)
- B. What (Example: Fire truck needed ASAP)
- C. Why (Example: Structure fire)
- D. Where (Example: Cy Fair High School)
- E. Who (Scott Gibson, manager, shelter two)

## 6.2 TRANSMITTING

Stations must not transmit unless invited to do so by the Net Control (NCS).

### 6.2.1 Exceptions:

- A. Stations with tactical emergency traffic.
- B. As designated in the standard operating procedure of Amateur Radio.

6.2.2 Keep transmissions short and to the point. All stations, including net control, should leave frequent gaps in their transmissions for emergency traffic. Long enough for someone to recognize the gap and announce "emergency traffic."

## 6.3 COMMUNICATIONS METHODS

Operators should use the most efficient method available to transmit their message. If available and appropriate, use the telephone, cell phone, internet, packet, foot, automobile, etc. The more traffic passed off the air, the more available ham radio is for traffic to and from locations without alternate means of communications.

## 7. DEMOBILIZATION

7.1 The OIC shall be the final authority for demobilization following an emergency incident or net.

7.2 Stations shall keep Net Control informed when they have been released from any assignments. They shall report the Name and Title of the person releasing them, and the served agency name to Net Control.

7.3 Net Control will enter the message details in the net log.

7.4 Released stations should identify their availability for additional assignments and continue to monitor the assigned frequency.

## 8. TRAINING, TESTS AND ALERTS

8.1 An annual test will be conducted during the Fall of each year in conjunction with the nationwide Simulated Emergency Test (SET) sponsored by ARRL. Periodic exercises will be conducted in cooperation with local emergency management coordinators.

8.2 A training net will be held for the membership beginning at 8:00 PM local time each Sunday night per the following repeater schedule, or other designated frequency.

1st Sunday 8:00 PM 146.660 (-) 141.3 Hz  
2nd Sunday 8:00 PM 147.000 (+) 103.5 Hz  
3rd Sunday 8:00 PM 147.300 (+) 151.4 Hz  
4th Sunday 8:00 PM 444.600 (+) 71.9 Hz  
5th Sunday 8:00 PM Wide Area Net 147.000 (+) 103.5 Hz and 444.600 (+) 71.9 Hz

8.3 At the discretion of the EC, NW HC ARES will sponsor an unannounced activation at least once a year.

8.4 A Standard Operating Procedure, detailing emergency response procedures and actions in support of this plan, shall be written.

**8.5** The North West Harris County Amateur Radio Emergency Service Emergency Communications Plan and the Standard Operating Procedure shall be reviewed during February of each year to keep this plan current and viable.

**8.6** The training requirements for members shall be reviewed annually to ensure that the requirements of the served agencies are met.

For 2011, the requirements are:

Members shall have completed IS 100, 200, 700 & 800

EC, DOs and AECs shall have completed the above plus ARECC Level 1 and IC 26 and IC 300 (the 300 course is a class room only course so attend whenever it might be possible)

## **9. DEFINITIONS**

**9.1** ARES – Amateur Radio Emergency Service – a voluntary field organization of the American Radio Relay League (ARRL). It is composed principally of FCC licensed amateur radio operators who are trained emergency communicators, volunteering their personal time, skill and equipment, to serve in the public interest, with neither pecuniary interest nor compensation. Other personnel who have an earnest interest in emergency communications are also welcome, eg CERT members

**9.2** Duty Officer (DO) – a temporary, rotating, assignment to provide a point of contact for public safety and service organizations during a specific time period.

**9.3** Emergency – any immediate threat to life or property.

**9.4** Incident – any communications emergency that occurs without notice.

**9.5** Officer In Charge (OIC) – NW HC ARES official responsible for all operations when the organization is activated for an incident or public service event.

**9.6** Public Service Event – a pre-planned activity for a non-profit organization, used to provide training and experience for ARES members. Examples include a parade and fun run.

## 10. Appendix

### 10.1 ARRL Policy concerning the acceptance or termination of Field Service Volunteers.

10.1.1 The ARRL is not obligated to accept volunteer service from anyone.

10.1.2. The ARRL is not obligated to continue to accept volunteer service from anyone, even if it has accepted such service in the past.

10.1.3. The ARRL does not discriminate in accepting volunteer service based on suspect classifications, including race, skin color, nationality, sex, age, sexual orientation, or religion.

10.1.4. The ARRL does not require criminal background or credit checks as a precondition to volunteer service.

10.1.5. Local Field Service units may conduct searches of public databases when considering whether to accept volunteer services.

10.1.6. If local Field Service units wish to terminate the volunteer service of any existing member, the ARRL has determined the primary responsibility for notifying the volunteer of the decision to terminate the volunteer's service should lie with the Section Manager, or his designee. This procedure permits a uniform response to be maintained across all Sections. The written communication from the Section Manager, or his designee, should substantially conform to the form provided by the ARRL. The written communication, letter or email, should thank the volunteer for the volunteer's past service and advise the person their service is no longer required. The written communication should not, under any circumstance, state a reason for the decision to terminate the volunteer's service.

10.1.7. Local Filed Service units may decline to accept volunteer service based on the results of public database searches, provided the decision to decline volunteer service is not based on suspect classifications. However, no reason should be stated, orally or in writing, for the unit's decision not to accept the volunteer's service.

10.1.8. Active Membership requirements, Northwest Unit, Harris County ARES.

In addition to the requirements of District 14 we require the following.

- Participate in at least one of the following activities a year. (Needless to say participation in an actual call for volunteers to any incident would fulfill this requirement.)
  - o Drill.
  - o SET.
  - o Public Service Event.
  - o General Membership Meeting.
- At least once a year log in to and verify the information in the ARES Member Database is up to date and accurate.
- Log in to the weekly training nets whenever possible.