

KNOW YOUR AGENCIES! KNOW YOUR PARTNERS!

Intro: As ARES members, we support a number of agencies around us with emergency communications. Similarly, there are a number of other organizations that also support the same or similar agencies with emergency communications.

To be fully effective, we should all be well informed about, not only our role, but also how we interface with these agencies and our partners.

HARRIS COUNTY HOMELAND SECURITY & EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT (HCHSEM)

Here is a brief summary about HCHSEM

1. It has offices and an EOC located in the Transtar building so often the organization is incorrectly called Transtar!
2. It is responsible for the well being of the whole Harris County during emergencies
3. Emergencies in the past have been mostly weather related, particularly flooding, hurricanes and tornados. However, their scope is not limited to these events and covers any emergency whether it is natural or man-made.
4. Harris County is the third largest in the US and has 30+ municipalities and almost 4 million residents. About 1.2 million live in unincorporated areas and rely heavily on the County for services.
5. Then who has responsibilities for action during emergencies?
 - The lowest level, usually the cities, have prime responsibility for handling events in their area
 - When their resources are exhausted or insufficient, they request assistance from the County who will endeavor to provide additional help. This may be from County resources or with mutual aid from other locations or organizations.
 - When the County's resources are exhausted, assistance is requested from the local DDC. The DDC is the Disaster District Committee which is the first step in managing resources for the State of Texas via the Division of Emergency Management.
 - From the DDC, assistance requests may escalate to other State assets and also to the Federal level.
 - The DDCs are divided into Regions with Harris County, Galveston & Brazoria in Region 2
 - The DDC is composed of representatives from many organizations and is chaired by the Highway Patrol Commanding Officer (which is why the DPS building is a key location)
6. Why is this structure important to us?
 - We need to understand and respect the chain of command as we assist served agencies
 - If messages do not follow this chain, they may be duplicated or lost.
 - We need to be careful who our served agency is, that is, who is our client. We are assigned to provide that agency assistance and not take 'short cuts' routing messages that skip steps in this chain of command
7. In summary, Harris County has a complex and extensive role during emergencies, which is part of the reason that ARES is considered very important to their emergency operations
8. Further information can be obtained from <http://www.hcoem.org/default2.php>