

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.

MARS

Here is a brief summary about MARS – the Military Affiliate Radio System

1. MARS provides auxiliary or emergency communications on a local, national, and international basis in addition to normal communications.
2. MARS is composed of amateur radio licensees.
3. MARS is sponsored by the Dept of Defense, but there is no requirement to be, or have been, part of any military force
4. MARS has agreements in place for emergency communications with the National Guard, FEMA, DPS, Texas Dept of Emergency Management, SHARES (which is part of the National Communications system), the TSA (Transport Security Administration)
5. Members participate in regulated, disciplined radio nets with structured lines of organization and very specific operating rules.
6. Members are required to be active on a regular basis and submit participation hours each month.
7. MARS communication concentrates on HF voice, but is now strongly diversifying into Winlink. For example, MARS has approx 24 HF PMBOs all of which are Pactor 3 and which enjoy clutter free frequencies (as opposed to the amateur radio Winlink system which has approx 20 public and 14 emcom PMBOs in the US, many of which are forced to share the same frequencies!)
8. There is greater availability on HF frequencies which enables nets to 'chase' the optimum frequencies that depend on the time of day and sunspot cycle
9. The FCC is not the governing body for MARS frequencies!! The Communications Act assigns joint jurisdiction for spectrum management to the FCC and the NTIA (the National Telecommunications and Information Administration which is part of the Department of Commerce). The FCC is responsible for non-federal users (e.g. broadcast, commercial, public safety, and state and local government users, etc.) and NTIA is responsible for federal users. The majority of spectrum is shared between federal and non-federal users, in which case the FCC and NTIA must coordinate spectrum policy. They operate under a Memorandum of Understanding.
10. MARS has organizations in the 3 services and are called ARMY MARS, NAVY MARS, AIRFORCE MARS
11. Around Greater Houston, here are some items of interest:
 - MARS is represented at several major airports to support the TSA
 - The ARMY MARS liaison officer with other services is Hal Merritt, KD5HWW
 - Transtar is capable of MARS operation
12. Further information can be obtained from <http://www.txarmymars.org/>