

Learning Unit part 1.

Amateurs as Professionals –This training session and the one that I will presented later will help you to understand the critical and delicate relationship between Ares/Races emergency communicators and the agencies we serve. Information: What has our "attitude" got to do with this? In a word, everything! It is even more important than your radio skills. Historically speaking, the attitude of some Amateur Radio volunteers has been our weakest point. In situations where a professional and helpful attitude is maintained, served agencies point with pride to ham's efforts and accomplishments. The opposite situation is clearly illustrated in the words of one emergency management official who said, "Working with ham radio operators is like herding cats -- get them the heck out of here!" This man was clearly frustrated with the attitude of his volunteers. Although our name says that we are "Amateurs," its real reference is to the fact that we are not paid for our efforts. It need not imply that our efforts or demeanor will be anything less than professional. "Professionalism" means getting the job done efficiently -- with a minimum of fuss. No matter which agency we serve -- emergency management, the Red Cross, or others,(Transtar, the Houston EOC the many hospitals we serve) it is helpful to remember that Ares/Races volunteers are like unpaid employees. But If you maintain the attitude that you are an employee of the agency you are serving, with all that employee status implies, there is little chance for you to go astray. You are there to help solve their communication problems. Do whatever you can, within reason, to accomplish that goal, and avoid becoming part of the problem. Who Works for whom, the relationship between the volunteer communicator and served agency will vary somewhat from situation to situation, but the fact is that you work for them. It doesn't matter whether you are part of a separate radio group like the Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES), or part of the agency's regular volunteer force. You still work for them.

Your job is to meet the communication needs of the served agency, Period. It is not to show off your fancy equipment, nor to impress anyone with your knowledge of radio and electronics. A "know-it-all" or "I will show you how good I am, and how inadequate you are" attitude will end your -- and our -- relationship with the served agency in a hurry. It is often said that volunteers don't have to take orders. This is true -- we do not. However, when you volunteer your services to an organization, you implicitly agree to accept and comply with reasonable orders and requests from your "employer." If you do not feel comfortable doing this, do not volunteer. There may be times that you find yourself unwilling or unable to comply with a served agency's demands. The reasons may be personal, or related to safety or health, or it may be that you do not consider yourself qualified or capable of meeting a particular demand. On rare occasions, it may be that they ask you to do something not permitted by FCC rules. Regardless of the reason, respectfully explain the situation, and work with the served agency or your leadership in the communication group to come up with an alternative solution. If the discussion with the served agency becomes difficult or uncomfortable, you can always politely pass the discussion up to your immediate Ares/Races leadership so that they can handle it instead. Without a positive and well established relationship between emergency or event professionals and competent volunteers, professionals are likely to look at them as "less than useful." There are several reasons for this. Fire departments have a long history of competitive relationships between professional and volunteer firefighters, and this attitude may carry over to volunteers in general. Police agencies are often distrustful of outsiders -- often for legitimate information security concerns. Professionals in any field put a great deal of time and effort into their skills and training, and take considerable pride in their professional standing. As a result, they may view themselves as able to handle all possible situations without outside assistance.

Volunteers, on the other hand, are often viewed as "part timers" whose skill level and dedication to the job vary widely. Many agencies and organizations have learned that some volunteers cannot be depended on when they are needed most. Do not be offended if this attitude is obvious, and remember that you cannot change it overnight. It takes time for you to prove yourselves, and for a positive working relationship to develop and mature. The middle of an on-going incident is not the time to try to change a "we do not need you" attitude. If your offer of assistance is refused, do not press the issue. The incident commander is busy with more pressing needs, and if he changes his mind about your offer, he will probably contact you. Remember: the served agency's authority should never be challenged -- They are in charge, and you are not. Performing Non-Communication Roles It has been said many times that our job should be strictly limited to communication. But is this a hard and fast rule? When you work as a SKYWARN weather spotter, or collect and relay damage reports for the Red Cross, is this not going beyond your role as a communicator? Well, yes and no. The old model of the emergency communicator was one where a written message would be generated by the served agency and handed to the radio operator. They would format and transmit the message to another station, whose operator would then write it out and then deliver it to the addressee. In this role, hams were strictly communicators, and due to the radio technology of the times, it was appropriate. Those days are gone forever. In today's fast paced emergency responses, there is often no time for this sort of system. Events are happening too quickly, and the agency's communications must move at the same speed. The job description will more likely be "any function that also includes communication," as defined by the served agency. For this reason, emergency communication groups should engage in pre-planning with the served agency to ensure that these jobs are clearly defined, and any additional job-specific training required is obtained in advance. In general, Ares/Races emergency communications groups should be prepared to perform jobs for their served agency that include the need to communicate.

Here are a few of the many possible job descriptions: Radio operator, using Amateur or served agency radio systems. Dispatcher, organizing the flow of personnel, vehicles, and supplies. Resource coordinator, organizing the assignments of disaster relief volunteers. Field observer, watching and reporting weather or other conditions. Damage assessor, evaluating and reporting damage conditions. Van driver, moving people or supplies from location to location. Searcher, also providing communication for a search and rescue team. To perform these jobs, you may need to complete task-specific training courses, and take part in exercises and drills in addition to those required for emergency communication even beyond traditional Amateur Radio. In the ever-changing world of emergency response, this flexibility will become increasingly important if we are to continue our contribution to public safety as Amateur Radio operators. Note: Some Ares/Races groups may still enforce a "communication only" policy, and in some agencies, the old model may still be appropriate. Discuss this with your Emergency Coordinator. End part one