

Learning Unit part 2.

Specific Agency Relationships The relationship between the volunteer communicator and the served agency can be quite different from agency to agency, and even between different offices of the same agency. While the ARRL and other national communication groups have existing "Memorandums of Understanding" (MOU), sometimes called a "Statement of Understanding" (SOU) or "Statement of Affiliation" (SOA), in place with many served agencies that define our general relationships, the actual working relationship is more precisely defined at the local level. Different people have different ideas and management styles, agencies in one area can have different needs from others, and these can affect the working relationship between the agency and its emergency communications volunteers. Ares/Races groups often have their own written agreements with the agency's local office. Here are some examples of relationships:

Department of Homeland Security (DHS): In June 2003, ARRL and DHS signed a Statement of Affiliation, making ARES an affiliate member of DHS's Citizen's Corp community readiness program. The agreement provides for training and accreditation of ARES members, raising public awareness of Amateur Radio's role in emergency communications, and coordination of shared activities.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA): In most cases Amateur Radio operators will have little direct contact with FEMA and other federal agencies, except within the Military Affiliate Radio System (MARS) and at the national level with ARRL. American Red Cross chapters may have their own communication teams that include Amateurs, or they may have a SOU with a local ARES group or radio club. Typical assignments include linking shelters and chapter houses, performing damage assessment, handling supply and personnel logistics, and handling health and welfare messages. The Salvation Army maintains its own internal Amateur Radio communication support group, known as the Salvation Army Team Emergency Radio Network (SATERN). In some areas, ARES or other groups provide local communication support. Assignments are similar to the Red Cross.

State and Local Emergency Management: Some state and local emergency management agencies include Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES) teams as part of their own emergency communication plan. Others use "outside" groups such as the ARES. In a growing trend around the country, all ARES members are also RACES registered operators and vice versa. Communication assignments may be similar to the Red Cross and Salvation Army, but may also include government command and control, and inter-agency communications. SKYWARN is a self-contained program sponsored by the National Weather Service, and not all members are Amateur Radio operators. Many use other radio systems or telephone, fax or email to send in weather observations. SKYWARN volunteers collect on the spot weather observations that will allow forecasters to create forecasts that are more accurate, and issue timely warnings.

Talking to The Press In any emergency situation, the press will be hunting for any tidbit of information they can get, and they may not care where they get it. One place they should never get information regarding the served agency or its efforts is from you. Politely refer all such inquiries to the served agency's public spokesperson. If you offer such information "just to be helpful," because you enjoy "being in the spotlight," or to get some publicity for yourself or your group, the served agency would be well within its rights to ask you to leave. Some Ares/Races organizations also have their own spokesperson. In ARES this person is called the "Public Information Officer" (PIO) - other organizations may use a different job title. Their job is to handle press inquiries so that radio operators can do their jobs without interruption. In most all cases, they would only answer questions about the Amateur Radio group's efforts, and not those of the served agency. If a reporter just will not leave you alone, you might feel obliged to say something so they will go away. In this case, the only thing you should discuss is your part of the emergency communication effort, but only if you are part of a separate group such as ARES,

and only if that organization's policy permits it. If they are impeding your ability to do your job, briefly explain this to the reporter and politely but firmly direct them to the PIO or a management person. Regardless of the situation, it is always a good policy to know in advance how your organization or served agency would like you to deal with press inquiries. If your organization does not have a "press" policy, you might suggest that one be developed. This will help prevent misunderstandings and hard feelings later.

And thinking of the press we need to remember that whether we are working a disaster or a public service event or any volunteer effort involving hams we are in the public eye. If it's something you really wouldn't want to see on the ten o'clock news you might want to reconsider. Since cameras are everywhere these days we don't want to wind up as an on You Tube. Focus on the job at hand. How we carry ourselves reflects not only on us as individuals but on our hobby, ARES and the agencies we serve. That trust takes years to develop but moments to lose.