

North Dakota's Amateur Radio Emergency Communications Plan

(ARES Plan)

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Executive Summary

The North Dakota Department of Homeland Security (DHS)/ State Emergency Manager oversees all 53 counties of North Dakota. This structure is naturally required by the governmental political subdivisions of state/county/city. Nationally, the ARRL (Amateur Radio Relay League) in its ARES (Amateur Radio Emergency Service) has paralleled this geopolitical organizational structure of counties.

Rural states such as North Dakota do not have the population density per county of amateur radio operators to support an ARRL county by county ARES organizational structure. As of August 2009 there were approximately 1547 amateur radio licensees in North Dakota per the FCC license database. Many counties probably do not have many or *any operational* amateur radio operators as the license grant is ten years and people become inactive. Demographic studies show that the North Dakota population is aging. (*ND Data Center*). This trend probably holds true for amateur radio operators as well.

Other rural states such as New Hampshire have adopted a *population density* based ARES structure. This consists of a handful of regional vs. county based District ARES Emergency Coordinators (DEC's). The North Dakota plan consists of four (4) DEC's. See below for more detail.

North Dakota counties have variable population density and emergency management experience and training. Other served agencies such as the North Dakota Health Department have organized along four multi-county units. The North Dakota American Red Cross has adopted an organizational structure that is based along population density centers and population scarcity with six units, two each in the east, the middle, and the west of the state. The North Dakota Emergency Managers Association (EMA) is divided into four regions as well: NW ND, SW ND., NE ND, and SE ND. The EMA is the professional organization for ND county Emergency Managers.

North Dakota's ARES Organizational Structure

I. ND Section Emergency Coordinator (SEC)

The SEC consists of an individual appointed by the ND ARRL Section Manager with the overall responsibility for the North Dakota ARES Organization. Duties in general are well spelled out on the ARRL website and can be consulted there. An Assistant Section Emergency Coordinator (ASEC) may be appointed by the SEC where population density of active ARES members along the Red River may call for an adjunct to the SEC to help with span of control issues in the east. Also, such a person serving as adjunct to the SEC may be assigned liaison duties with State Radio and ND DHS to support the ARES organization.

II. District Emergency Coordinators (4)

- A. East North (Grand Forks)
- B. East South (Fargo or Wahpeton)
- C. Midstate
- D. West

Alternately, this number could be expanded to six DEC's, covering two each in the east, central, and west if travel and meetings become an issue. We anticipate the DEC's/EC's will develop relationships with their local served agencies, therefore four (4) positions for now should be adequate.

III. Local Emergency Coordinators (EC)

The number of local Emergency Coordinators supporting the AREC program will be variable, based on geographic population growth or losses.

ARES Organizational Issues

1. The structure will be based on major population density lines in combination with geographical regions. It is expected that there will be a natural linkage with most clubs as they too depend on enough hams in the area to maintain a club.
2. The current group of EC's that support the state of North Dakota will be contacted to identify their continued interest along with their training and understanding of the present ICS relationships. Emergency communications competencies and training to keep themselves current (i.e. ARRL EMCOMM courses) is requested but not required. The EC's role would be to work with their local county EM and local served agencies.
3. Accept all ARES interested registrants and assign to a regional DEC and EC.

ARES Organizational Training

1. Emergency Communication Coursework

- (a) ARRL recommends EMMCOM I for all ARES team members and EMCOM II for EC/DEC. The federal ICS courses are also recommended just as they are for all other non government entities in North Dakota.
- (b) The quality of the ARES Team is based on good training and development. Those who volunteer for ARES leadership positions are requested to take some form of formal training or demonstrate their understanding of the ARES program. General ARES members will not be required to take any certification courses but need to be willing to work with EC's and DEC's to achieve a common emergency communication goal.
- (c) To date 14 ND hams have registered as ARES members and 3 additionally have requested EC/DEC appointments. The SEC and the DEC's should put a recruitment program together to sign up new interested amateurs.

North Dakota State Radio

State Radio is updating its communications plan statewide. This is a federally driven update as part of the National Incident Command and the National Framework for Interoperability in Communications, which includes non-government resources.

State Radio has requested a statewide list of ARES resources. This does not mean North Dakota amateurs will be *involuntarily sent* to any emergency activity. It helps the North Dakota Department of Homeland Securities in their planning effort.

North Dakota State Radio Challenges

1. DHS/background check/ID to gain access to an EOC needs to be addressed. This item will have to be addressed with state and county officials such as the Department of Homeland Securities and the Emergency Managers according to their degree of desired security.
2. There needs to be more discussion about which organization should be the main group supporting statewide emergency communications. The two national programs are the ARES (Amateur Radio Emergency Service) program and the RACES (Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service) program. The consensus at the State Radio meeting held in Bismarck in 2009 was for the ARES program. It was also mentioned at the same meeting that RACES has more frequency limitations and is in decline in federal support. This will have to be addresses before moving forward with North Dakota State Radio.

County and State Emergency Management Challenges

1. Handling ND's EM relationships

Leaders in the North Dakota ARES organization should strive to develop good EM relationships and be diplomatic. All ARES volunteers also share in presenting themselves professionally and diplomatically in their interactions with their served agencies. Some EM's seek to know who their county hams are and we should be able to give them that information. Leaders in the North Dakota ARES organization should seek to identify what each EM would like from us or where we can support them.

2. Fulfilling a useful Role to EM's

- (a) EM's need to know what resources and capabilities amateur radio can provide and who is willing to help. This will vary naturally according to the interests, capabilities, and commitment of individual ARES members.

- (b) EM's should work with the ARES group to develop their Resources Plan - Operational Plan for emergencies. There is a question whether the EM's need hams to be "trained and vetted" for FEMA re-imbursement reasons. Note: If enlisted and vetted, there is WSI coverage. This is provided already to other organized non-government volunteers when they respond in an emergency. Vetting is a process of examination and evaluation, generally referring to performing a background check on someone before offering him or her employment. In addition, in intelligence gathering, assets are vetted to determine their usefulness.

3. Handling Spontaneous Amateur Radio responders to an emergency

- (a) This is a reality when a disaster occurs like the Red River flood this past spring 2009 which was well handled by the eastern ND ARES leadership. People care and want to help when the disaster occurs but aren't always so enthusiastic to train and prepare ahead of time. However, some thought should be given as to how to plan and prepare and organize for our spontaneous Amateur Radio volunteers.

4. Relationships with other Served Agencies

- (a) How do we develop relationships with our other served agencies?
- (b) What relationships can we commit to help and how?
- (c) At present the SKYWARN program of the National Weather Service (NWS) has been a major served agency for amateur radio operators in North Dakota. The SKYWARN program is open to any concerned citizen irrespective of radio capability in loose

affiliation with the NWS. Many hams are active not just ARES members. In some ham clubs, SKYWARN is seen as the ARES function of the club.

- (d) The Salvation Army, the ND American Red Cross, the ND Hospital Association, and the ND Health Department are other actual or potential served agencies. There is a pending request from the SW ND health department to meet and discuss the ARES program. The Eastern ARES leadership is working with the Salvation Army and other served agencies and has sought ARRL MOU guidance. There are organizational developments of a hospital based emergency amateur radio service in the eastern part of North Dakota.

This is a draft of the plan for North Dakota ARES support in North Dakota. Any input would be appreciated to bring this plan to its final stage.

Thanks

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