

WCKY ARES - Operations Plan



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1.0 Introduction

We as members of The Kentucky District 3 Warren County ARES strive to be an effective partner in emergency/disaster response, providing the citizens and public service/safety partners with communications expertise, situational awareness and capabilities of professional communicators. We will accomplish this mission by utilizing our equipment, expertise, skills and capabilities as Amateur Radio Operators to effectively pass message traffic, provide accurate and detailed situation reports, and be active during field exercises. We strive to be supportive in times of need in our local communities and beyond.

Remember: Secure your family and your home first. Do not respond until they are safe and well provided for.

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3.0 Purpose

The purpose of this document is to document the outline of WCKY ARES operations, including concepts, policies, and other organizational topics. This document will act as a guideline and an organizational framework in support of Emergency Communications within the WCKY ARES group. It is intended to promote uniform procedures among group members, officials, and operators.

4.0 Scope

This document only applies to the WCKY ARES group and not necessarily those of any other Region, Section, or Division of ARES or of any particular other agency, though nothing in this document excludes them to being used for those purposes.

5.0 Definitions and Acronyms

- EC - Emergency Coordinator
- AEC - Assistant Emergency Coordinator, appointed by EC
- LACO - Local ARES Communications Officer, usually the EC, who is the ultimate decision maker for all emergency communications operations for the local ARES group
- NCS - Net Control Station
- EOC - Emergency Operations Center
- NVIS - Near Vertical Incident Skywave, an HF antenna closer to the ground than $\lambda/2$ to the ground, especially good for regional communication or hilly terrain
- ARESMAT - ARES Mutual Assistance Teams

6.0 Concepts

6.0.1 Statements

ARRL Mission Statement ARRL's mission is to promote and protect the art, science, and enjoyment of amateur radio, and to develop the next generation of radio amateurs.

ARES Vision Statement To be the premier amateur radio emergency communications service to the United States and its territories.

ARES Mission Statement ARES strives to be an effective partner in emergency/disaster response, providing the citizens and public service/safety partners with communications expertise, situational awareness and capabilities of professional communicators.

6.0.2 Qualifications for Membership in ARES

All participants shall have a valid Amateur Radio license issued by the Federal Communications Commission. All participants must have a serious interest in providing volunteer radio communications support in an emergency. All participants shall have an interest in self-improvement

and maintaining standards for excellent community service. All participants need to have full membership in ARRL for leadership and certifications Advanced and above.

Many of the partner agencies that ARES serves have mandated and structured training programs where all participants receive the same training so that, upon completion of the training, when activated or assigned to serve an agency in the field all such participants are presumed to be qualified to assume any position to which they were assigned.

6.0.3 Authority

The Amateur Radio Service in the United States is governed under the rules of the Federal Communications Commission (Title 47 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 97. Specifically, Part 97.1.a (revised October 1, 2008); the FCC rules recognize that a fundamental purpose of the Amateur Radio Service is to provide voluntary noncommercial communication service to the public with respect to emergency communications.

Additionally, the FCC in part 97.407, authorizes such Amateur Radio stations to also be enrolled with their local Emergency Management Agency (EMA) in the Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES) to provide emergency communications support to local, county and state governments.

The Amateur Radio Service also supports the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency's (NOAA) National Weather Service (NWS) with Radio Amateurs assisting as communicators and storm spotters in the SKYWARN program. This program was developed to promote a cooperative effort between the National Weather Service and communities. Local SKYWARN county coordinators are appointed by the Regional NWS Forecast Office (NWSFO). Whenever possible, this person should also be appointed as an ARES Assistant Emergency Coordinator for SKYWARN to lead this function and to arrange for recurring training of county Amateur Radio Operators. All ARES operators are also encouraged to maintain proficiency as SKYWARN spotters through training offered by the regional NWSFO office.

This approach ensures that the Amateur Radio response to an emergency is well coordinated while providing the most flexibility in operations and effective allocations of limited resources. This concept is reflected in the latest guidance from the ARRL and aligns well with the Incident Command System (that is used in Tennessee and throughout the United States).

6.0.4 Concept of Operations

The Amateur Radio operator's primary emergency service mission is to provide supplemental communication channels. In addition, Amateur Radio operators should have a high degree of technical ability that can assist in quickly establishing communications recognizing that each emergency is different, and as such, flexibility is a necessity in order to provide an appropriate and adequate response.

Amateur Radio serves as supplemental communications (as opposed to a backup emergency system) to established services and often is not called immediately if normal communications circuits are intact and adequate. Members should monitor developments and be prepared for swift deployment should such a request be received.

Periodic drills, training, and instruction should be carried out to insure readiness and quick response in providing effective communications when the need arises. District Emergency Coordinators and County Emergency Coordinators should arrange to participate or create an effective annual Simulated Emergency Test to test their organizations capabilities.

Agencies that may be served during a communications emergency include, but are not limited to, Emergency Management Agencies, Emergency Operations Centers, hospitals, shelters, police, fire, rescue squads, schools, military, utility companies, large industrial concerns, the National Weather Service, forestry services, or other volunteer agencies such as VOAD, The American Red Cross, Southern Baptist Relief or the Salvation Army. Contact should be made with selected agencies prior to crises to develop mutual understandings and plans of action. Memoranda of Understandings exist between ARRL and some of these organizations. (See Appendix for a complete list of ARRL National MOUs.)

The EC will keep a band plan of operating frequencies for local communications to include repeater operation, simplex operation, and digital operation. The plan will include multiple frequencies and back ups for each to offer redundancy to combat equipment, power, availability, and traffic needs.

This plan states that the need for additional communication paths including (but not limited to) APRS, NBEMS, DSTAR, etc., is necessary, but a formal plan has not been created at this time.

6.0.5 Organization

The principal level of organization for ARES in Kentucky is at the District and County level. There are 10 districts in Kentucky, subdivided into a differing number of counties. Warren County is in District 3.

The SEC appoints the DEC and EC based on the advice of the ASEC and DEC for each county within each district. The EC is responsible for organizing local amateurs into an effective and flexible team supporting both governmental and non-governmental agency emergency needs. AEC may be appointed by the EC to assist in various organizational functions such as administration and reporting, training, logistics, public relations, etc.

6.0.6 Safety

The number one concern for every ARES member is the safety and protection of their family and property. Preparing for family safety must take place before any activation. When deploying, safety during travel to, from, and while at a deployed location is critical. After arriving at the designated check-in point, members should report to the COML, EOC Manager, or other point of contact and identify the Safety Officer or Medical Unit Leader. Members need to include their medications in their "Go Kits". In addition, they need to advise their Team Leader or Safety Officer of any limitations in their ability to carry out assignments. Other safety considerations include situational awareness, local hazards, power safety, RF safety and equipment safety.

6.0.7 Common Threats

Category	Type/Name	Rank/Likelihood
Natural	Earthquake	Catastrophic
Natural	Floods	Likely
Natural	Ice Storm	Likely
Natural	Tornado	Likely
Natural	Human Pandemic	Catastrophic
Natural	Wildfire	Likely
Technical	Hazmat - Chemical	Likely
Human Caused	Terrorism	Likely

As outlined in the 2024 Kentucky Emergency Operations Plan, we outline our priorities to the following, regardless of the type of threat, hazard, or event, along with our served agencies:

1. Life
2. Health
3. Safety
4. Property protection
5. Environmental protection
6. Restoration of essential services
7. Restoration of essential functions
8. Coordination among all levels

6.0.8 Planning

The EC will develop a written emergency communications plan in collaboration with the county Emergency Management Director or other cognizant individual in the Authority Having Jurisdiction to define how emergency communications are to be handled within their county. The plan shall allow for the support of government operations between County and City EOCs and between the county and state EOC, while simultaneously supporting operations between shelters and the local Salvation Army and Red Cross chapter.

These plans and resources will be documented in the:

- Field Operations Manual
- Field Resources Manual

When operating in support of non-governmental relief agencies such as the American Red Cross, Salvation Army, etc., Amateur Radio operators will function as ARES operators in accordance with

the guidelines published by the ARRL Public Service Manual, the appropriate MOU, and the county EC.

Support of public gatherings such as walkathons, parades, etc., can provide valuable operational experience. These gatherings will also serve as chances to recruit new ARES members and will also be used as training opportunities.

6.0.9 Training

Three levels of training allow ARES participants to enter the program and migrate to higher levels of qualification and service. The training baseline and tracking of individual training progress will be based on the current standard version of the ARRL ARES Taskbook, which can be found at https://nathanielbutts.github.io/WCKY-ARES-Taskbook_Aug2026.pdf. This version will be updated as new or changed requirements are added, then communicated to all current ARES members.

The following levels classify current intensity levels of involvement to ARES:

A FEMA Student ID is required to register for and participate in any courses or training provided by FEMA. The FEMA SID will serve as a unique identifier and be used to maintain the record of FEMA training. (Go to <https://cdp.dhs.gov/femasid> to register.)

Level 1

This is the primary level for those who choose a non-leadership role as well as those new to Amateur Radio or emergency communications. This introductory training is conducted by the local ARES group to meet their needs and those of their served agency or partners. This training could be formal or informal, and introduces the ARES participant to the fundamentals of emergency communications and provides instruction on how participants are to conduct themselves while serving in the field or otherwise activated. Participants may elect to remain at this level, or any level, based upon the extent of their desired ARES involvement.

Level 2

To qualify for this level, participants shall have completed the following courses: ARRL's EC-001 Introduction to Amateur Radio Emergency Communications, an online, no-cost program, and FEMA IS-100, IS-200, IS-700, and IS-800. (See appendix for links to these courses.) Participants are also encouraged to take advantage of training opportunities available through partners to enhance their knowledge and skill set.

Level 3

This level of training prepares ARES participants to take on leadership positions such as EC, ADEC, DEC, ASEC, and SEC, and other designated positions in the ARES program. Candidates for these positions have one calendar year from date of appointment to complete these courses. Participants are required to complete ARRL's EC-016, Emergency Communications for Management, and FEMA Professional Development Series consisting of courses IS-120, IS-230, IS-240, IS-241, IS-242, IS-244, and IS-288. Participants also are encouraged to complete FEMA courses IS-300 and IS-400, which are classroom-based and instructor-led.

6.0.10 Warnings and Alerts

Levels of warnings or alerts will be listed as follows:

- Level 1 = potential for activation
- Level 2 = impending activation
- Level 3 = activation

For Level 1 warnings or alerts an official anticipates a potential need for ARES assistance. The following sequence shall be initiated:

1. EC contacts EMA officials to confirm contact information and information related to potential activation
2. EC contacts WCKY ARES group members to confirm contact information and member availability
3. ARES members should check their equipment and ensure they have emergency power capabilities
4. ARES members should check or prepare 24 hour or 72 hour go kits
5. EC notifies DEC, ASEC, or SEC of situation

For Level 2 warnings or alerts an official has identified an impending need for ARES activation. Level 1 tasks shall be initiated, if not already performed, and the following items shall also be initiated:

1. EC contacts local EMA official to obtain list of sites and locations where communication may be needed, along with staging areas
2. DEC, ASEC, or SEC contacts other county ECs in the district to inform of potential need for additional ARES members from other districts

For Level 3 warnings or alerts, the local EMA official has officially requested support from WCKY ARES group. The EC will act as liaison between served agency and deployment of ARES personnel. Upon arrival at assigned location, ARES members should identify themselves immediately to the person in charge.

6.0.11 Activation

WCKY ARES operates under the “lead agency” principle. This means that the local ARES group responds to requests from the agency that has the authority under local, county, or state legislation to provide the lead in response to an emergency or disaster. This entity is referred to as an Authority Having Jurisdiction. In most instances this will be the local county emergency management agency (EMA). By following this guideline, amateur radio resources are coordinated through the local EMA and any conflicts for the resources are decided by EMA officials who are in a better position to prioritize communications needs.

The EC shall have an MOU with their local Emergency Management Agency including contact information. The MOU should be reviewed periodically and contact information kept current.

Activation and deployment of ARES resources must be requested and authorized by public safety, emergency management, or other government organizations or non-government agencies that have

an existing MOU with the ARRL. Local ARES groups are activated by the Emergency Coordinator or, when delegated by the EC, the Assistant Emergency Coordinator.

ARES members should not respond to any emergency or request from any agency unless the County EC or delegated AEC, or in their absence the DEC, SEC or SM, has authorized deployment of ARES. **Members should never self-deploy to any incident.** If an ARES member becomes aware of a communications emergency, they should make every attempt to contact their County EC or AEC to ensure that he or she is aware of the situation.

Once the local ARES group has received an activation request, the County EC must notify the DEC as soon as possible. The DEC should in turn notify the ASEC and SEC or, in the absence of an SEC, the SM. The County EC may request additional assistance from other ARES groups within or outside of their county by contacting the appropriate DEC. The DEC may request assistance from other ARES groups in other Districts by contacting the ASEC or SEC/SM.

We will practice "never go alone" in deployment, to provide multiple operators and equipment to each location, and allow one operator to establish communication while a second sets up equipment.

When activated, ARES personnel will be tasked with specific responsibilities provided through an established chain of command for the incident or event. In a NIMS/ICS environment, ARES members may be asked to do things that fall outside the narrow role of radio operator, and while part of the NIMS/ICS team every effort should be made to comply, provided such requests do not exceed the level of any individual's training and do not compromise safety or legality.

6.0.12 Mutual Assistance Teams

In a large scale disaster, resources can be quickly overwhelmed, especially if recovery operations or the event are going to be prolonged. To assist with this possibility, the EC will actively seek to form ARES Mutual Assistance Teams (ARESMAT) with other ARES groups in the district or area. An MOU will be developed with each allied ARES group defining the relationship and level of support on offer. The EC for WCKY will also keep a list of ARES members who are willing and able to be part of a mutual assistance operation for other counties or districts.

The EC from an ARESMAT allied group can contact the WCKY EC to request aid. Requests for ARESMAT assistance may also come from the DEC, ASEC, SEC, or SM for Kentucky. The WCKY EC will follow the protocols for alerts as outlined in **Warnings and Alerts**, but will defer to the first responding ARES EC as the point of contact rather than EMA officials.

6.0.13 Messages

Formal messages to be sent by ARES members must be prepared and signed by the appropriate public official to facilitate the movement of equipment, personnel and resource requests in support of emergency protective measures, search and rescue and recovery efforts.

Health and welfare traffic are messages concerning the welfare of people in the affected area and can be from people within the affected area to family in another area to let them know they are safe, or they can be an inquiry from family outside of the affected area. In either case, these messages are

low priority and are usually handled after the initial response has moved into the recovery phase. In most instances, the Red Cross coordinates these inquiries.

Whenever possible, packet stations, NBEMS stations, Winlink and/or D-Star stations should be established for handling most non-tactical or formal traffic, i.e., all welfare requests, logistics supply requests, damage reports, etc. Packet, D-Star, NBEMS, and Winlink provide more detailed information, are less likely to be misinterpreted, and take up less air time. In addition, it is more difficult for the public to monitor and decipher these communication modes. As such, they provide a low level of operational security (OPSEC).

In order to maintain proficiency with respect to passing formal traffic, it is essential that operators routinely practice. One method of doing this is to participate in the National Traffic System as an Official Relay Station, passing formal traffic on a regular basis. Other methods include participation in ARES drills, exercises and nets. The ARRL Radiogram form is used on the NTS nets on a regular basis and all operators should be familiar with its use. Radiogram forms are downloadable from the ARRL website.

6.0.14 Shelter Operation

Shelter operations and other deployment sites should be staffed by a minimum of two ARES operators; one to manage the radio and the other to act as a runner/logger. Communications will normally be on 2 meters or 70 cm. However, other modes/technologies such as MESH or NBEMS may be employed.

The purpose of radio operators supporting shelters is to provide communications between the Shelter Manager and the organization in charge of the shelters, usually the Red Cross or Salvation Army. Shelter operations may be on their own net depending on the scale of the incident. Some of the communications involved may be lists of persons at the shelter, logistics requests, or welfare messages. Ideally these should be passed by packet, NBEMS, Winlink, or D-Star. Internal shelter communications should be accomplished by other means, i.e., simplex, Family Radio Service, etc.

Operators should avoid accepting duties or roles other than those associated with the function of ARES. All external shelter communications should be authorized by the Shelter Manager or designee and should be in the form of a written message. Non-shelter assignments may permit more flexibility in the duties assigned to the ARES operator.

6.0.15 Search/Rescue Operation

Search Rescue Operations ARES members may be called upon to assist agencies conducting Search and Rescue operations. Many times these types of operations are conducted in remote areas, where communications on the served agency's frequencies may be challenging due to lack of repeaters. In most instances communications will be tactical in nature and a single net will be sufficient. In addition, simplex operations may be sufficient with the occasional use of a repeater to pass logistical requests.

The NCS should choose the most appropriate modes.

6.0.16 Public Service Communications

Public service communications are provided to organizations sponsoring a public event. Public service communications are usually scheduled, do not require activation by an emergency management agency, and do not normally require coordination with multiple agencies.

6.0.17 Working with Served Agencies

The ARES field organization is a self-contained emergency communications organization. It is designed to support, upon request, emergency response and disaster relief organizations. When an ARES operator is assigned to a duty post anywhere, he/she remains an ARES operator for the full length of the assignment. Although the operator comes under the operational authority of the served agency, he/she remains under the administrative authority responsible directly to the local County EC or designee.

ARES retains its own identity and organization structure, personnel and physical infrastructure while providing communications support. When dealing with served agencies, including county emergency managers, remember that ARES is itself a self-contained emergency organization that works with the served agency, not for it; that is, in partnership.

The ARES infrastructure includes privately owned radios, antennas, ARES dedicated and cooperating repeaters and accessory equipment. Even more important than the equipment, the organizational structure includes numerous nets, training exercises, community support and cooperative planning with the agencies.

When officials request ARES support they get the full benefit of all this, as well as the personal services of many volunteer operators, many of whom are not visible in the emergency or disaster area. At the same time, be mindful that ARES operators working in a served agency will be perceived as a part of their organization, should be governed by their dress, grooming, and behavior standards, and should be prepared to do anything within reason to assist them.

7.0 Revision History

Version	Date	Author	Notes
1.0	2026.08.24	KQ4TIV Nathan Butts	Initial creation