

## SECTION 4: UNDERSTANDING EMERGENCY OPERATIONS

This section provides information about emergency operations and how they are managed.

Once you complete this section, you will be able to:

- Describe the phases of disaster assistance
- Explain when ARES may become involved
- Discuss emergency operations roles and sites
- Discuss telecommunications needs during a disaster
- Discuss the role of amateur radio during disasters
- Consider your participation in roles other than communications.

### ASSISTANCE PHASES

Most municipalities base their emergency planning on four phases of response:

#### Phase 1 - Preparedness

This is the period in which emergency plans are drawn up and tested, and other arrangements are made to deal with a disaster should one occur. It is during this phase that both primary and secondary Emergency Operations Centres (EOC) are established and arrangements made for mutual aid. Training and the exercising of plans are major parts of the preparedness phase.

#### Phase 2 - Immediate response

The immediate response phase begins with the onset of the disaster and remains in effect until initial recovery begins. The immediate response can run from a few hours to 30 days. It is during this phase that 'responders' are activated and the emergency plan implemented.

#### Phase 3 - Initial recovery

The initial recovery phase follows the immediate response phase and sometimes overlaps with it. During initial recovery, temporary installations are used to provide services and mitigate harm in preparation for longer term recovery and restoration.

#### Phase 4 - Long-term restoration

Once the disaster is over, long-term restoration begins. This can include such things as the restoration of transportation and telecommunications systems, the rebuilding of damaged equipment, and the reconstruction of buildings, roads and other infrastructure.

## ARES INVOLVEMENT

ARES could be called upon to assist in any phase, but is more likely to be involved during Phase 1, Phase 2, and possibly parts of Phase 3.

ARES only becomes involved in an disaster when prompted by a served agency.

## EMERGENCY OPERATIONS

Disasters come in a variety of types and sizes, each requiring a specific type of response. There are, however, certain basic elements of a response that are common to virtually all disasters. Some of these are as follows:

### Designated disaster areas

There are always one or more ‘designated disaster areas’. These are usually the areas directly affected by the disaster.

### Site manager

There is always a ‘site manager’, usually appointed by a regional authority (for example, a City Manager or Mayor) to be in overall charge of the disaster site. Where several sites are involved, there will be a site manager for each site. All disaster related initiatives at a site go through the site manager. (When the Incident Command System is being used, there will also be an incident commander who manages the overall response to the disaster.)

### Emergency operations centre (EOC)

In virtually all disasters, an EOC is established. That EOC is usually a pre-designated room where senior officials meet to coordinate the response and support those at the disaster site. EOC personnel facilitate and coordinate the response efforts of officials at the disaster site.

### Incident command post (ICP)

The ICP is the onsite location where the incident commander controls the incident. The ICP may be as simple as the tailgate of a vehicle or as sophisticated as a large complex with extensive communications services.

### Command post (CP)

A CP may be established within any section of the ICS Operations Section. CPs can be used as a central control location within the ICS organization. This can be used to centralize command, control and communications.

## TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Telecommunications between the disaster site and the EOC are critical. Without reliable communications, it is impossible for the EOC to know what is going on, let alone coordinate activities. These telecommunications facilities are normally provided using systems operated by the responding agencies (for example, the police and fire radio systems). Typically, the communications facilities are pre-installed and tested periodically to ensure that they will operate during a disaster.

Disaster response personnel have largely adopted cellular telephones and handheld computers as a backup to the telecommunication facilities used by primary responders. However, when cellular facilities become overloaded or unreliable, alternate telecommunications facilities are needed (for example, rented commercial radios).

## ROLE OF AMATEUR RADIO

Amateur radio operators who understand the process and are properly trained and regularly exercised can be of tremendous assistance during emergencies.

When properly trained in formal message handling, amateur radio operators can be used to transmit a wide variety of messages on behalf of participating agencies – particularly those who do not have their own telecommunications resources. These messages could include operational messages requesting equipment needed at the site. Logistic and supply messages are often used to arrange for food and supplies at the site. Personnel and administrative messages dealing with the replacement of shift workers are also important.

Amateur radio operators can replace communications systems that have failed, augment systems that are overloaded, or simply carry lower priority traffic that would otherwise not be communicated at all.

### Served agencies direct operations

Served agencies direct our operations. We manage communications to meet their needs, but the served agencies define those needs and identify their communications requirements to us. We are there to serve their needs.

It is important that ARES personnel remember their place in the overall organization. Do not try to take over a situation. Your role is to communicate, not to lead.

## YOUR PARTICIPATION AS MORE THAN A RADIO OPERATOR

Depending on the nature of the emergency, the location where you are deployed, and your skills, capabilities and willingness to help, you may find yourself taking on responsibilities over and above those of a radio operator. For example, you may be called upon to drive a vehicle, help transport other workers or the public, keep watch over an entrance, site or piece of equipment, or even serve soup in a field kitchen.

There has been a lot of debate about whether amateurs should allow themselves to be tasked with non-communications tasks during an emergency. (In some cases, amateurs have been asked to serve roles that have nothing to do with communications.) In general, volunteers are expected to be willing to take on a range of responsibilities. (For example, the Canadian Red Cross expects volunteers to be cross-trained and willing to perform whatever function is needed at a particular site.)

While the choice to take on additional responsibilities is solely your own, based on your comfort with those responsibilities, your evaluation of associated risks, and your own moral compass, in general ARES encourages you to lend whatever aid and support is needed at your place of deployment.

Consider the following guidelines when deciding whether to accept additional responsibilities:

- If the role you are being asked to serve is of greater benefit to the site than your role as a communicator, please consider accepting the request.
- Do not accept a responsibility for which you are unqualified or unsuited. (For example, do not offer to drive a school bus during an evacuation if you do not have a school bus license.)
- Ensure that the site manager is aware of and in agreement with any request that may compromise your ability as a communicator, and that the site manager understands the possible effect on site communications.
- If your new responsibilities will limit your ability as a communicator (for example, by taking you away from your station or distracting you from traffic), contact the net controller, communications supervisor or emergency coordinator to ensure that they are aware of changes in availability.

It is the emergency coordinator's responsibility to ensure in advance of actual emergencies that an understanding exists with served agencies, including the Canadian Red Cross, to ensure that when a request is made for ARES support, it is made in good faith to meet a communications need and not a general need for volunteers.