

SECTION 16: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

This section provides answers to commonly asked questions raised by ARES volunteers.

WHAT CAN I DO TO MAKE MYSELF MORE EFFECTIVE AS AN ARES OPERATOR?

The following best practices may make you a more effective ARES operator:

- Start a log. Write down date, time and description of any significant activities, events, or observations. This helps you keep track of your responsibilities during your shift, helps your replacement continue after your shift, and may also help forensically after the operation. Use a pen. Never keep a log in pencil.
- Document as much as you can. Document your own activities, your communications, your observations, and any injuries or traumas you experience.
- Don't expect people to know who you can talk to or how to send messages. Put up big signs that explain your function, let people know who you can talk to, and help them through the messaging process.
- Spend as much time as possible following up on messages and trying to close the loop.
- Get into digital communications. The more you can do here, the more useful you will be in a disaster.
- Assemble Grab and Go bags for your gear. Use one bag for personal gear (waterproof) and one for a single station set-up. Do not over-pack. If one person can't carry it, it is too much.

WHERE AM I LIKELY TO BE POSTED AS AN OPERATOR?

The places where you might be posted during an emergency depend on the nature of the emergency, the number of operators available, and other unpredictable factors. In general, it is expected that you may be posted to locations such as:

- Emergency Operations Centres (EOC) at City Hall, in a police station, or at another government facility
- Incident Command Post (ICP)
- Command posts (CP)
- Municipal buildings
- Hospitals
- Seniors residences and special-care facilities
- Shelters

- Schools and arenas
- Community centres
- Airport
- Evacuation points
- Transit buses used for evacuations
- Mobile survey or command units
- Police stations
- Your own home (net controllers, relay stations, NTS traffic handlers, and backup operators)

WHAT EQUIPMENT DO I NEED IN ORDER TO PARTICIPATE?

In general, you need a 2m FM transceiver during exercises or emergency situations. Ideally, you need a primary and backup transceiver, to ensure reliability.

If you have packet equipment, you should configure it so that it can be transported onsite. (For example, install packet software on your laptop, and package your station so it can be carried in a briefcase.)

In some situations, we may also make use of HF channels, either using portable stations set up at the time of the emergency, or using home-based HF stations that relay traffic carried over 2m FM.

If you don't have equipment, you can still participate in ARES. Other participants may have spare equipment that can be loaned, or you may be able to assist or operate at an Official Emergency Station (OES).

DO I NEED TO BE ABLE TO DRIVE IN ORDER TO PARTICIPATE?

No. If you do not have access to a car, or cannot drive at the time of an exercise or emergency, alternate arrangements may be available. Let your EC or net control know during the callout about any restrictions on your mobility. If you have permanent restrictions (for example, if you don't own a car), let your EC know so that plans can be adjusted accordingly.

DO I NEED MY OWN RADIO EQUIPMENT IN ORDER TO PARTICIPATE?

If you do not have 2m equipment, or any radio equipment, you can still participate. You may be posted to an onsite location with its own radio equipment, or equipment may be loaned to you by another ARES operator.

IF I HAVE A PHYSICAL RESTRICTION OR DISABILITY, DOES THAT MEAN I CAN'T PARTICIPATE?

You are welcome to participate regardless of physical restrictions or disabilities. Your ability to operate your radio station qualifies you for ARES participation. Let your EC know about any restrictions or disabilities so that plans can be adjusted accordingly.

WHAT IF I GO ON VACATION OR TRAVEL?

Let your EC know when you are going to be out of town for extended periods. (This is a suggestion, not a requirement.)

WHAT IF I AM REGISTERED WITH ANOTHER EMERGENCY OR DISASTER RELIEF ORGANIZATION, AS WELL AS ARES?

Participation in other emergency and disaster relief organizations does not affect your eligibility to participate in ARES. If you are registered with another organization, please let your ARES EC know so that plans can be adjusted accordingly.

AM I INSURED DURING ARES EVENTS?

Generally, no. ARES does not provide any form of liability, disability or workers compensation insurance.

Check with your own insurance provider to determine whether you are covered by your personal policies during ARES volunteer activities.

Also check with your EC to determine whether you are covered by Workers Compensation or Worker Health and Safety during activations by specific served agencies. In many cases where emergency volunteers are working for a municipal service and are registered with the municipality, the volunteer is covered by the municipal liability insurance and Workers Compensation insurance.

In most provinces, Workers Compensation coverage is extended to all registered volunteers responding during a state of emergency. (This coverage may not apply during training exercises.)

If you are a [RAC](http://www.rac.ca) member, you are automatically covered for liability up to \$5 million. Full details are available at http://www.rac.ca/service/insurance/faq-liability_e.php.

Your ARES group may also have purchased RAC liability insurance that covers you during ARES activities.

SHOULD I BRING A CELLPHONE ON A CALLOUT?

Yes. If you have a cellphone, bring it. Cellphones, when they are working, can be invaluable when coordinating an activation or troubleshooting a station setup. In addition, a cellphone may allow your business or work to reach you when needed, which in turn may allow you to take leave from work more easily and remain on station longer.

SHOULD I BRING A POLICE SCANNER ON A CALLOUT?

No. Although an emergency services (police, ambulance, fire) scanner may be useful to you while at home during an emergency, it is not a good idea to bring an emergency services scanner with you on a mobilization. There are several reasons for this:

- The use of mobile police scanners is illegal in many municipalities.

Note: In Canada, information heard on scanners – which is not intended as a broadcast for any one listening – must not be divulged to any third party. Amateur radio transmissions, however, do not have this protection.

- Scanner traffic may distract you from your primary purpose (ARES communications) when onsite.
- The scanner may cause clients to mistake your role while onsite, and will detract from the professional image you need to maintain.
- You should get your ‘situational awareness’ from ARES channels, and not from emergency services channels.
- Traffic on emergency services channels may include highly confidential or sensitive information, especially during a real emergency. You do not want to be responsible for others overhearing this traffic, even inadvertently.

The only exception to this recommendation is the case where you are specifically requested by an EC, communications supervisor or net controller to monitor emergency services traffic. Typically, this role (if required) will be assigned to a home base station in response to a specific need.

WILL WE USE MOSTLY VOICE OR MOSTLY PACKET?

In many situations you will use both, but the degree to which you use packet will depend on the situation and the client needs. Voice communications will be used during all emergency situations. In situations where ARES is carrying extended formal traffic between specific locations, packet will be used to carry that traffic. In many scenarios, the bulk of the traffic will be carried by packet or over other digital modes. However, voice channels will still be used to coordinate those packet communications.

WILL WE USE CW AT ALL?

It is possible that CW may be used in a limited way in the following situations:

- When a message needs to be protected from casual eavesdropping, and digital modes are unavailable
- When a low-power or out-of-range station is unable to check into an HF net using voice
- During extreme propagation events that prevent reliable HF voice communications.

WHAT IF I AM ASKED TO SEND A MESSAGE 'SECURELY'?

If you are asked to send a message securely, inform the originator that you cannot legally encrypt or code any communications that are to be sent over amateur channels.

If you and the recipient location are equipped with packet, inform the originator that you can send the message digitally, which will provide some privacy from the public and the media. Winlink 2000 and automatic FBBS transfers also offer increased security since the message content is transferred in binary format rather than ASCII format.

If you and the recipient location are equipped with HF or CW, try to pass the traffic over an HF channel or using CW (which is less likely to be monitored).