

SECTION 28: CREATING STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES AND DOCUMENTATION FOR YOUR REGION

This course provides a range of information resources and best practices for ARES operation. However, you will also need standard operating procedures (SOP) specific to your region and your scenarios.

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

- Explain the importance of SOPs
- Describe the contents of an SOP
- Write an SOP.

A good SOP is essential when bringing in trained operators from other areas or groups.

Operational experience: *In Alberta, labour laws mandate that any task that has a potential for hazard or injury must have a hazard assessment and a written SOP. This can be as simple as a tripping hazard due to an open filing cabinet drawer when carrying a large object or box.*

If someone is injured or killed and there is no SOP, all supervisory personnel involved directly or indirectly are liable. This can even include a town council and a mayor. This even affects nonprofit groups and registered clubs. An SOP is a standard guide to assist trained staff in assessing and responding to a situation.

If an amateur radio group is going out to install a tower or antenna, it needs a hazard assessment, a written safety plan and an SOP for that activity. This is also true if ARES responds to an emergency or provides services at an event.

Operational experience: *In fire departments, the rule of thumb is, “If it is a re-occurring situation, write an SOP. If it happens for the first time, then wing it. If it happens again, write an SOP!”*

You may choose to establish a steering committee within your ARES group to make decisions and create appropriate SOPs.

This section provides information that you will need when preparing your SOPs.

CONTENTS OF AN SOP

A standard outline for SOPs is outlined below:

COVER PAGE

- NAME OF GROUP
- NAME OF DOCUMENT
- GROUP CREST (if available)
- FULL ADDRESS OF GROUP
- DATE OF DOCUMENT

LETTER OF PROMULGATION OR PURPOSE OF DOCUMENT

- INCLUDE AUTHORITY FOR DOCUMENT AND
- SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZING AGENT OR DIRECTOR

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF DOCUMENT IF REQUIRED

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RECORD OF CHANGES OR CORRECTIONS

- IDENTIFICATION OF CHANGE OR CORRECTION; REFERENCES TO MESSAGE DATE-TIME-GROUP; ETC.
- DATE, CHANGE/CORRECTION ENTERED
- CORRECTION/CORRECTION ENTERED BY (SIGNATURE)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

(CAN HAVE BOTH A BRIEF AND DETAILED INDEX)

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(Each paragraph in a chapter should be numbered in sequence with the chapter and paragraph number. IE 4.12 - chapter 4 paragraph 12)

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

TIPS FOR WRITING A GOOD SOP

If your SOP is going to be effective, it needs to be well written and appropriate for your audience. Consider the following tips when writing your SOP:

- Familiarize yourself with modern writing standards. A good reference is *Strunk and White, Elements of Style*.
- Query your team to see if there is anyone with professional technical writing or editing experience who can assist in the effort.
- Keep in mind that the SOP is not in and of itself your training document. The SOP is meant to be used *in the field*, during actual exercises and operations. Write it with that in mind, focusing on important information and leaving out anything that operators do not need *while performing their work*.
- Write in the **active voice**.
- Include flowcharts and diagrams whenever practical.
- Keep the language as simple as possible, without distorting its meaning.
- Use short sentences with specific messages and meanings. Do not be ambiguous.
- Make any imperatives (actions) very easy to find on the page.
- Use lots of white space on each page.
- Provide a detailed table of contents and index.
- Number each chapter and paragraph (for example, 4-14).

CREATING CALLOUT TREES

If your ARES group has a large number of participants, or covers a large area, organize the callout list geographically.

Remember to update your callout tree regularly.

If you have participants who you do not expect would be routinely available for callouts, include them on an extended callout list, or ensure that those participants are at the bottom of your callout list.

If you have formalized mutual aid agreements with ARES groups in other regions, gather key names and contact information from those ARES groups and include them in at the bottom of your callout tree.

CHECKLISTS

Prepare customized checklists for your ARES team members:

- Equipment
- Personal articles
- Site-specific checklists