Community and Disaster Services

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The RAC Field Organization was established 30 years ago to assist communities by supporting local clubs or organizations.

Radio Amateurs of Canada has always been interested in local activities across the country.

Through the reports in the Community and Disaster Services and the Club Corner and Coming Events columns in TCA magazine and on the website, we are pleased to assist community groups, clubs and disaster service groups in sharing information about what is taking place in their region.

Message from Community Services Officer

For many months now, you have been reading about the Auxiliary Communication Service (ACS) and its development in Ontario. Radio Amateurs of Canada is a national organization and we are now looking to expand our efforts to bring ACS across Canada. In this column I have included a brief overview of the National plan and the groups that need your help to make this transition happen. While we are still far from complete in Ontario, we are looking for volunteers to help achieve our goals in Ontario and support the future deployment of this program. Over the next few months, additional information will be provided on the RAC website and through our Social Media platforms.

New Volunteers in Ontario

Ontario North: Eric Todd, VE3XET

Ontario North is introducing a new Auxiliary Communications Service Team member, Eric Todd, VE3XET, as the ACS Section Coordinator. He will work with the Ontario North Section Manager Allan Boyd, VE3AJB, to foster team development and training programs under the new Auxiliary Communications service.

Eric Todd, VE3XET, has a professional career that has been focused on providing health care on the frontline, along with mid-level administration. It includes 45 years of service with Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and eight years with the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) as a Medical Technician (Med tech) with a short deployment to Europe. Concurrently, he was also a Tactical EMS provider with the Ontario Provincial Police. Early in his career, he was active with unions to improve the lives of EMS workers and he served as a Superintendent for 20 years. He provided care at the Advanced Care Paramedic level.

Eric became interested in telecommunications as a young adult – first in CB radio and then Amateur Radio. He obtained his Advanced Amateur Radio Qualification in 2018. He participates in local VHF/HF nets and is part of the Canadian Forces Affiliate Radio System (CFARS) network with CAF. He is also the Emergency Coordinator for Thunder Bay.

Ontario South: Ryan Dobbie, VE3WXF

In Ontario South, Ryan Dobbie, VE3WXF, is replacing Scott Maybee, VA3SFM, as ACS Coordinator. Scott has stepped away for personal reasons.

Ryan Dobbie, VE2WXF, brings more than two decades of experience in emergency response, public safety/ education and operational readiness. His background spans medical first response, hazard mitigation/ identification, emergency communications and safety leadership across both public and industrial environments.

Ryan began his public safety career in 2000 as a Medical First Responder with St. John Ambulance of Fergus/Elora, later expanding into telecommunications and incident support roles. He holds certifications in 911 and Emergency Services Communications, Hazmat & Terrorism Awareness, Incident Command System (ICS) and Incident Management System (IMS) disciplines, Restricted Operator Certificates in Aeronautical & Marine, and multiple health and safety disciplines. His professional path includes serving as Joint Health and Safety Committee Co-Chair and Backup Team Lead at FIO Automotive, where he strengthened workplace emergency procedures and response capability, and contributed to logistics and operational support roles through continuous improvement projects.

In his current role with Auxiliary Communications Services, Ryan focuses on strengthening regional resilience through coordinated radio communications, training and community partnerships. He is committed to assisting in modernizing volunteer communications programs, enhancing interoperability, and supporting municipalities in preparedness and response.

Ryan is also the founder of HomeSafe Preparedness, a community-focused initiative dedicated to helping households and organizations build practical, customized emergency plans. He continues to advocate for accessible preparedness education, strong inter-agency collaboration, and the integration of

traditional and modern communication methods. After spending several years post-graduation on the move from Wellington County to Hamilton and back, Ryan now lives in Woodstock, Ontario, where he remains actively involved in regional emergency management, training and public safety outreach.

ACS Master Operational Plan 2026-2027

National Sustainability, Governance, Training, Recruitment & Deployment Strategy

Radio Amateurs of Canada is poised for significant progress this year with the ACS rolling out its operational plan for 2026-2027. The ACS aims to establish a nationally coordinated framework that enhances communication capabilities during emergencies. By focusing on governance, sustainability and interoperability, the plan is designed to support municipalities, counties and Indigenous communities across Canada.

One of the key initiatives includes standardizing training and deployment models to ensure that volunteers are well-prepared and can work effectively together. This year, RAC is also prioritizing the expansion of ACS operations into regions like Nova Scotia, Alberta and the Yukon, fostering a robust network of volunteer communicators.

With a clear commitment to volunteer growth and retention, the organization is implementing recruitment campaigns and training initiatives to build a sustainable, active membership base. Leadership onboarding and operational readiness models are also part of the strategy, which includes detailed month-by-month and week-by-week implementation plans.

Furthermore, the governance framework is designed to ensure national operational consistency and integrate multiple agencies into emergency management efforts. By focusing on these objectives, RAC is not only enhancing its operational readiness but also strengthening community resilience through effective communication in times of crisis.

The plan is designed to:

- Build a nationally coordinated Auxiliary Communications capability
- Establish operational governance and accountability
- Support municipalities, counties, NGOs, Indigenous and First Nation communities
- Standardize training and deployment models
- Develop interoperable communications capabilities
- Establish sustainable volunteer growth and retention
- Expand ACS into Nova Scotia, Alberta, and the Yukon
- Build long-term financial sustainability
- Create a measurable operational readiness model

National Operational Governance

The RAC ACS governance framework is critical to ensure the effective operation and integration of communication resources across various levels of emergency management. This framework is designed to create a cohesive and standardized approach that promotes:

1) National Operational Consistency

By establishing uniform practices and protocols, the framework ensures that all ACS units are prepared to respond effectively, regardless of their location. This consistency is vital during national emergencies where different jurisdictions must work seamlessly together.

2) Interoperability Alignment

The framework emphasizes the importance of aligning communication systems and technologies among all participating entities. This facilitates real-time information sharing and collaboration, enabling a more efficient response to incidents.

3) Provincial Coordination Capability

By fostering strong coordination capabilities at the provincial level, the framework ensures that local entities receive the necessary support and resources. This enhances the overall operational effectiveness and responsiveness of ACS teams in emergency situations.

4) Volunteer Accountability

The framework promotes transparency and accountability among volunteers, which is essential for maintaining trust and ensuring that all team members understand their roles and responsibilities. This accountability is crucial for effective teamwork during critical response efforts.

5) Sustainable Leadership Development

A key strength of the framework is its focus on nurturing future leaders within the ACS program. This involves providing training and mentorship opportunities, which help cultivate a strong leadership base capable of guiding the organization through challenges.

6) Multi-Agency Emergency Management Integration

The framework encourages collaboration among various agencies involved in emergency management. This integration not only enhances resource utilization, but also promotes a shared understanding of roles and objectives in crisis situations.

7) Operational Readiness Standards

Establishing clear standards for operational readiness ensures that all ACS teams are prepared to respond promptly and effectively. Regular assessments and drills help maintain high levels of preparedness.

8) Deployment Governance:

The framework provides structured guidelines for the deployment of resources and personnel during emergencies. This governance is essential for making informed decisions that maximize safety and efficacy during crisis responses.

National Organizational Structure:

Enhancing Program Effectiveness

The national organizational structure outlined in the ACS program plays an essential role in maintaining clarity and delineating responsibilities across different levels. This hierarchy ensures that the governance framework is implemented effectively:

National ACS Leadership: Responsible for setting national policies and governance frameworks, this leadership body plays a crucial role in ensuring interoperability and alignment across various ACS units. Their strategic direction helps maintain national readiness and response capabilities.

National Review Board: Tasked with oversight and establishing standards, this board ensures that all ACS operations adhere to the highest quality benchmarks. Continuous evaluation and improvement processes safeguard the program's effectiveness and reliability.

Provincial/Section ACS Leadership:
This level focuses on executing provincial operations while aligning with national directives. Their local expertise allows for tailored responses to regional needs and challenges.

District ACS Leadership: Serving as the backbone of local operational support, District Leaders coordinate resources and activities at the community level. They are essential in translating national policies into actionable plans on the ground.

Community Response Teams: These teams are critical for field deployment support. Equipped and trained to respond to emergencies, they play a pivotal role in the immediate response and recovery processes within their communities.

In summary, the RAC ACS governance framework and the national organizational structure are integral to the program's success. By promoting consistency, accountability and collaboration, they ensure that the ACS can effectively meet the challenges posed by emergencies, ultimately safeguarding communities and enhancing public safety.

ACS Working Groups

The Auxiliary Communications Service is at a pivotal crossroads, and establishing its Working Groups is crucial to shaping a resilient future. These groups focus on key areas that enhance the capabilities and effectiveness of the ACS, ensuring that it can adapt to emerging challenges and technology in emergency communications. National Working Groups have been formed to address various critical needs within the ACS including:

Interoperability Working Group:
This group is dedicated to developing and refining interoperability standards that are essential for seamless communication among agencies and organizations during emergencies. By evaluating and supporting communication technologies, this group helps ensure that all responders can connect and collaborate effectively.

Indigenous & Rural Support Working Group: Recognizing the unique challenges faced by Indigenous and rural communities, this group works to tailor support and resources to enhance ACS engagement and effectiveness across diverse environments.

Training & Exercise Working Group: With a focus on preparedness, this group coordinates training programs and operational exercises and develops curriculum materials. By elevating instructor standards and providing comprehensive training, they ensure that all members of the ACS are well-equipped to handle emergencies.

Recruitment & Retention Working Group: This group is vital to sustaining the ACS by developing strategies and initiatives to attract and retain volunteers. The success of the service relies heavily on a dedicated and trained workforce.

Technology & Innovation Working Group: As technology rapidly evolves, this group focuses on integrating the latest advancements into ACS operations, fostering innovation to improve communication efficiency and effectiveness.

Emergency Management Integration Working Group: This group works to ensure ACS operates within a broader emergency management framework, reinforcing cross-sector collaboration and enhancing overall emergency response.

NGO & Community Partnership Working Group: By forging partnerships with non-profit organizations and community groups, this working group enhances resource sharing and support networks, strengthening local emergency responses.

Funding & Sustainability Working Group: Finally, this group addresses the critical need for sustainable funding models to support ACS's ongoing activities and ensure the service can maintain its operations over the long term.

Each of these groups has specific responsibilities and estimated annual volunteer hours that underscore their commitment to the ACS mission. For example, the Interoperability Working Group estimates around 450 volunteer hours needed to develop essential standards, while the Training & Exercise Working Group anticipates 700 hours to foster community preparedness. If you are interested in taking part in the National development, please contact me at community@rac.ca.

In summary, the ACS Working Groups are essential to the future of auxiliary communications. Their dedicated efforts to establish standards, enhance training, innovate technology and build sustainable partnerships will not only improve current operations but also prepare the service for the unforeseen challenges of tomorrow. Now is the time to invest in these groups to ensure a robust, effective and adaptable communications service that responds to emergencies efficiently.

RAC ACS Ontario Corps Multi-Agency Simulated Emergency Exercise

Ontario Power Outage Emergency Exercise Scenario: September 25-27, 2026

Radio Amateurs of Canada is looking for volunteers to participate in a simulated emergency exercise from Friday, September 25 to Sunday, September 27. Interested individuals can contact their Section ACS Coordinators directly or Jack Benes at acs.interoperability@rac.ca.

Exercise Purpose:

This exercise scenario is a modernized adaptation of the 2003 Northeast Blackout that affected Ontario and large portions of northeastern North America. The scenario is designed for use during the Ontario Corps Multi-Agency Emergency Exercise scheduled for September 2026. The purpose of this scenario is to test interoperability, emergency communications, Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) coordination, volunteer deployment, logistics management, reception centre operations, overnight continuity planning, and provincial coordination under realistic and escalating conditions using ICS/IMS and EXRSIM operational software.

Exercise Objectives:

- Validate interoperability between Ontario Corps partners, municipal emergency management and volunteer agencies.
- Test Radio Amateurs of Canada Auxiliary Communications Service deployment procedures and field communications.
- Validate EXRSIM operational tracking, reporting and resource management.
- Exercise overnight continuity and shift rotation operations.
- Evaluate reception centre operations and volunteer processing.
- Validate food service operations under sustained conditions.
- Assess medical support and responder accountability.
- Evaluate ICS/IMS reporting, planning, logistics and communications workflows.
- Conduct an After-Action Review and identify operational improvements for 2027.

Historical Reference – 2003 Ontario Blackout

On August 14, 2003, a massive cascading electrical grid failure originating in the United States resulted in one of the largest blackouts in North American history. Approximately 50 million people across Ontario and eight US states lost power.

In Ontario alone:

- More than 10 million residents lost electrical service.
- Toronto, Ottawa, Hamilton, Windsor, Sudbury, Barrie and surrounding municipalities were affected.
- Telecommunications systems experienced intermittent failures.
- Water treatment and pumping systems were disrupted.
- Fuel stations became inoperable due to a lack of power.
- Traffic systems failed, creating severe transportation gridlock.
- Hospitals activated emergency backup systems.
- Emergency services experienced major operational strain.
- Public anxiety increased due to uncertainty and limited information.
- Volunteer organizations were mobilized to support vulnerable populations.

The outage lasted from several hours to multiple days, depending on the location and the infrastructure's restoration capabilities.

Modernized 2026 Exercise Scenario

At 08:15 hours on Saturday morning, a significant heat event combined with severe weather instability places exceptional demand on the Ontario electrical grid. Simultaneously, a cyberattack targets multiple interconnected utility management systems across northeastern North America. The cyberattack disrupts supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) systems, causing several transmission failures.

A cascading sequence of power interruptions spreads rapidly across southern Ontario, portions of Quebec, and the northeastern United States.

Within minutes:

- Large areas of Simcoe County lose commercial power.
- Cellular networks become overloaded and partially unavailable.
- Internet services experience intermittent outages.
- Fuel distribution systems fail.
- Banking and payment systems become unavailable.
- Water pumping systems begin transitioning to emergency operations.
- Public transit services are disrupted.
- Emergency call volumes increase dramatically.
- Public misinformation spreads rapidly across social media platforms.

At 09:30 hours, Simcoe County declares a local emergency and activates its Emergency Operations Centre (EOC). The Provincial Emergency Operations Centre (PEOC) begins enhanced monitoring operations.

Ontario Corps partners and volunteers are requested to assist with:

- Reception Centre operations
- Welfare checks
- Public information support
- Communications interoperability
- Resource tracking
- Community support operations
- Overnight shelter support
- Auxiliary communications deployment

The Radio Amateurs of Canada Auxiliary Communications Service (ACS) is tasked with:

- Establishing redundant communications links
- Supporting EOC-to-field communications
- Supporting reception centres and shelters
- Deploying HF, VHF, UHF, satellite and digital interoperability systems
- Supporting EXRSIM reporting operations
- Establishing backup communications pathways using PACE methodology

While this is just a brief overview of the larger plan, RAC hopes to have teams from across the province active during this event, not just local operators.

Additional details about the event and meeting times will be posted on the RAC website at www.rac.ca.

Please help RAC complete our vision of being a prepared and practised community-based support when disaster strikes.

– 73, Jason Tremblay, VE3JXT