

Chapter Three: ARES Mutual Assistance Team

(ARESMAT) Concept

The ARESMAT concept recognizes that a neighboring section's ARES resources can be quickly overwhelmed in a large-scale disaster. ARES members in the affected areas may be preoccupied with mitigation of their own personal situations and therefore not be able to respond in local ARES operations.

Accordingly, communications support must come from ARES personnel outside the affected areas. This is when help may be requested from neighboring sections' ARESMAT teams.

To effect inter-sectional support mechanisms, each Section Emergency Coordinator (SEC) should consider adopting the following principles in their ARES planning:

- Pre-disaster planning with other sections in the Division, and adjoining sections outside the Division. Planning should be conducted through written memoranda, and in-person at conventions and director-called cabinet meetings. An ARESMAT inter-sectional emergency response plan should be drafted.
- Development of a roster of ARESMAT members able, willing and trained to travel to neighboring sections to provide communication support inside the disaster area.
- Inter-sectional communication/coordination during and immediately following the onslaught of the disaster.
- Post-event evaluation and subsequent revision/updating of the inter-sectional emergency response plan.

When developing ARESMAT functions, ARES leadership should include the following basic action elements:

3.1 Pre-Departure Functions

Team leaders should provide ARESMAT members with notification of activation/assignment. Credentials should be provided for recognition by local authorities. They should provide a general and technical briefing on information drawn principally from the requesting authority, supplemented by reports from Amateur Radio, commercial radio, W1AW bulletins and ARRL officials. The briefing should include an overview of equipment and communication needs, ARESMAT leadership contacts and conditions in the disaster area.

The host SEC's invitation, transportation (including routes in disaster area) and accommodations considerations, and expected length of deployment should all also be reviewed with the team members.

3.2 In-Travel Functions

Before and while in travel to the affected areas, team leaders should review the situation's status with the team: job assignments, checklists, affected area profile, mission disaster relief plan, strengths and weaknesses of previous and current responses, maps, technical documents, contact lists, tactical operation procedures and response team requirements.

3.3 Arrival Functions

Upon arrival, team leaders should check with host ARES officials and obtain information about frequencies in use, current actions, available personnel, communication and computer equipment, and support facilities that could be used by the team to support the relief effort. The host's ARES plan in effect for the disaster should be obtained. A priority upon arrival should be the establishment of an initial intra-team communication network and an HF or VHF channel back to the home section for morale traffic.

Team leaders should meet with served agencies, Amateur Radio clubs' communications staff, local ARRL communications authority, and others as needed to obtain information and coordinate the use of frequencies. Communication site selections should take into account team requirements and local constraints.

3.4 In-situ Functions

Team leaders should make an initial assessment of functioning communication facilities, and monitor host ARES officials' communications, and other response team relief efforts to coordinate operations and reduce duplication of effort. Team members should be monitored and their capabilities to perform their duties evaluated. Proper safety practices and procedures must be followed. A daily critique of communication effectiveness with served units and communication personnel should be conducted.

3.5 Pre-Demobilization and Demobilization Functions

An extraction procedure for ham communicators should be negotiated with served agencies and host ARES officials before it is needed. To get volunteers' commitment to travel and participate, they must be assured that there will be an end to their commitment. Open-ended commitments of volunteers are undesirable, partly because they make potential volunteers hesitate to become involved.

Leaders must coordinate with the host ARES officials and served agencies, and other functions to determine when equipment and personnel are no longer needed. A demobilization plan should be in effect.

A team critique, begun on the trip home, should be conducted. Individual performance evaluations on team members should be prepared. Copies of critiques should be sent to both the home SEC and in-disaster SEC. Problems stemming from personality conflicts should be addressed and/or resolved outside of formal reports, as they only provide distractions to the reports. Equipment should be accounted for.

A post-event evaluation meeting should always be conducted, and a final report prepared so that an update to the inter-sectional ARESMAT plan can be made.

3.6 ARESMAT Member Qualifications

The individual filling the role of ARESMAT member must have high performance standards, qualifications, experience, and the ability to work with a diverse group of team members that will be required to provide relief to the affected areas. He or she must be able to work efficiently in a disaster relief operation under the most adverse conditions.

Additionally, a member should have demonstrated ability to be an effective team player, in crisis situations, a strong personal desire and strong interpersonal communication skills. A knowledge of how ARRL, Red Cross and other agencies function at both the national and local levels is helpful. A working knowledge of the incident command system is useful as many events are managed under this system.

Members should be respected and recognized by officials and peers as competent communicators and should understand a broad range of disaster response organizations' capabilities and communication requirements.

Important: Members must be available with the consent of their employer to participate!

They should be physically fit to perform arduous work under adverse environmental conditions.

3.7 Summary

It should be noted that there is a fine balance of authority over a deployed ARESMAT. The in-disaster SEC (or delegated authority) should be able to make decisions as to use and deployment of an incoming team. Therefore, an incoming team should be prepared to submit themselves to such authority; this is evidenced by the fact that any team, internal or external, has only a limited view of the overall operation. The supervising authorities will have a better overview of the whole situation.

In turn, however, the in-disaster authority should be discouraged from abusing the resources of incoming teams. Should a team no longer be required, or a situation de-escalate, the team should be released at the earliest possible time, so that they may return home to their own lives.

The ARESMAT tool should be one of last resort. Whenever possible, amateurs from the affected section should be used for support. It is a lot to ask of a volunteer to travel far from home, family and job for extended periods of arduous and potentially dangerous work.

<http://www.arrl.org/chapter-3-ares-mutual-assistance-team-aresmat-concept>