

## Chapter Six: Working with Public Safety Officials

Public service communications performed by ARES members are based on a number of requirements. Specifically, we must be accepted by public-safety officials. Once accepted, our continued ability to contribute in times of disaster is based on the efficiency and effectiveness of our performance. While acceptance, image, efficiency and effectiveness are all important to the ongoing working relationships between amateurs and officials, it is the initial acceptance that is often difficult to achieve.

Police and fire officials tend to be very cautious and skeptical concerning those who are not members of the public-safety professions. This posture is based primarily on experiences in which well-intended but somewhat overzealous volunteers have complicated, and in some cases jeopardized, efforts in emergencies. The amateur operator or other volunteer who wishes to be of assistance must be aware of this perception.

The police have generally had their fill of "groupies" or "hangers on." They can ill afford to tolerate frustrated individuals who have always wanted to be police officers or firefighters, but for one reason or another have never reached that objective. There seems to be an abundance of people, especially during a crisis, who will quickly overstep the limits of their authority and responsibility if they are given any opportunity to assist in an official capacity. In their zeal, such persons often inhibit the actions of trained personnel. Worse yet, they can make an already dangerous situation even more so by their getting in the way. With rare exception, Amateur Radio operators do not fall into this category. The problem is, however, that police officers in the midst of stressful operations may have extreme difficulty in distinguishing between those volunteers who are problem solvers and those who are problem makers.

Those very few hams who behave emotionally, are overzealous in offering their services or in describing their abilities or who abuse the established limits of their authority are doing the amateur fraternity a real disservice. The typical police officer or firefighter, like the typical civilian, does not understand the vast differences among various radio services, the types of licensing involved or the high level of expertise and discipline that is characteristic of the Amateur Radio Service.

When an amateur arrives at a scene and jumps out of a vehicle with a hand-held in each fist and two more clipped to the belt, all squawking at once, officials simply don't know how to respond. They are either overwhelmed by equipment they don't understand, or so awe-struck that they try to avoid what they perceive as threatening.

How Amateur Radio volunteers are accepted depends on their establishing a track record of competent performance in important activities. This begins with convincing officials that amateurs offer a cost-effective (otherwise known as free) substitute for functions previously paid for by the taxpayer. Local radio amateurs also must demonstrate that they are organized, disciplined and reliable, and have a sincere interest in public service.

(Edited. Some content removed) – Jeffrey Lamb KE6FF

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