

THE COMPUTER CORNER

No. 176: ARES/RACES

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I am departing from my usual technical writing to send you a message. I think it is important. Please take the time to read it.

ARES and RACES are very different organizations with a similar mission. The mission is reliable backup communications. In Wisconsin, one group and one leadership serve both. Since 1999, every member of Wisconsin ARES is also a member of RACES and vice versa.

ARES (Amateur Radio Emergency Service) is a volunteer group within the ARRL, a private organization. RACES (Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service) is a governmental-sponsored organization, now under the Federal Emergency Management Agency (a branch of Homeland Security). RACES is controlled by each state's Emergency Management department.

In Wisconsin, nearly every county of the 72 has an ARES/RACES unit. The hams in these units organize and train to serve with backup communications whenever their communities, or their neighbor's communities, are in need. These needs have surfaced many times in our state, during tornadoes, floods and other severe weather events, during fires and explosions, during massacres, during sinking of ships and during many other types of events. We have provided backup communications whenever called on by first responders and other governmental agencies, and often we have provided communication links when the agencies we serve cannot. ARES/RACES groups are important, and a Good Thing.

Most hams in our state are somewhat aware of the ARES/RACES organization. Many think **"Well, I don't really need to join ARES/RACES, but I will be here to help in case of emergency. After all, I am a ham and know how to operate my rig – that is all that is really necessary."**

That may have been true years ago, but it is no longer true. Today's ARES/RACES units train as communicators who learn how to communicate with and between governmental agencies. And, that type of communication is quite different than how we communicate as hams. Moreover, ARES/RACES hams **must** be familiar with the Incident Command System (ICS), used by all first responder and emergency support organizations in the US. Federal law mandates this training. Right now, every first responder **(including volunteers such as ARES/RACES personnel)** **must** be certified in ICS and also NIMS (National Incident Management System), an emergency management doctrine used throughout the country by first responders.

What does this mean to hams? In case of an emergency, if you are not a member of an ARES/RACES group with the appropriate training and certifications under your belt, you will not be able to help. It will simply be against federal mandates to have you to participate during an emergency, and you will be asked to stand down. Bummer!

The solution? It is really easy, and it can be interesting and fun! Join your local ARES/RACES group. Learn the lingo and become certified. Participate in training nets. Work the annual SET (Simulated Emergency Test). Volunteer to help the group as you can, when you can. You will be training to better help your neighbors, and yourself.

That is my message.