

ARRL Emergency Communications Advisory
Committee

To The ARRL Board of Directors

January 2012

Respectfully submitted by:
Dale Williams, WA8EFK
ECAC Committee Chairman

Report of the Emergency Communications Advisory Committee

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In June the ECAC was assigned the following: "The Amateur Radio Emergency Service and the National Traffic System exist as the ARRL's implementation of the basic principle stated in 97.1(a), "Recognition and enhancement of the value of the amateur service to the public as a voluntary non-commercial communication service, particularly with respect to providing emergency communications." The Emergency Communications Advisory Committee is hereby tasked by the Programs and Services Committee to recommend improvements to ARES® and NTS so that the amateur service can better serve the public in providing emergency communications. Specific topics should include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. ARES and NTS Objectives and Organizational Structures
2. Integration between ARES and NTS
3. Training, Certification, and Credentialing
4. Relationships with Served Agencies

Progress reports should be submitted to the PSC every 90 days and the final report should be submitted by June 1, 2012".

The foundation of this assignment requires a clear understanding of the present composition of both organizations, how effective they are in meeting their goals and objectives, what policies and procedures work well, which are marginal and which are failures. We will also examine how they are supported, and what shortcoming that support may have.

To develop a solid foundation of where both the ARES and NTS stand in the minds of today's field leadership, the ECAC designed two field surveys. These were conducted using Zoomerang® a web based polling system. Included in the ARES survey were all Section Managers and Section Emergency Coordinators. The NTS survey included the NTS leadership, TCC Staff and Region Net Managers plus SMs and their Section Traffic Managers.

Multiple detailed questions relating to all four of the above major tasks are included in the surveys. Many of the questions were designed to be thought provoking. Related questions were often located in different portions of the surveys to avoid "leading" the respondents. Respondents were also afforded the option of expanding their answers for any of the questions. The ARES Survey contained 40 questions and the NTS Survey 28. Both surveys are now complete and the ECAC team is carefully reviewing and analyzing the results. Over the next 60 days, the ECAC will continue this analysis and then begin the process of developing recommendations for submission to the PSC. It would be premature to offer comment about potential conclusions. It is however appropriate to express the Committee's thanks and appreciation to every respondent for their thoughtful and candid responses. The ECAC had hoped for insightful commentary and we were very pleased with the guidance

offered by the leadership teams from both organizations. There can be no doubt about the strength, sincerity and passion of those serving on both the ARES and NTS teams.

Several survey comments have been excerpted to allow the reader the opportunity to gain a sense of the general attitude of the more vocal respondents. These do not necessarily represent the majority, but are provided only to indicate typical style of the replies.

From the ARES Survey:

"The best emergency communications system is the one you use everyday. ARES and NTS should be highly integrated, not independent as now!"

"NIMS/ICS compatibility is urgently needed, and should be required. ARES should work from the local level up, as NIMS/ICS does. ARRL ARES could learn a lot from NIMS/ICS."

"There needs to be a standard for type acceptance of services so that when an agency calls for a "strike team" it is the same response regardless of location. (the name "strike team" is just an example, there could be several layers of organization, but there needs to be a standard.)"

"We need to build credibility from the top down and bottom up with Gov't served agencies. Need more visibility in THEIR training materials and plans. Need National ID approved by FEMA with background check and minimum training. We also need to make sure if All Else truly fails, the system is flexible enough that non-accredited operators can be used in some capacity."

"Better national policy generation from HQ"

"More national help to local and regional ARES organizations around the country."

"Questions above could also be applied to RACES. FEMA needs to kill the program and replace with ARES or a new combined ARES/RACES organization."

From the NTS Survey:

"Need to get the idea out that "Traffic" is central to effective ARES action. EMCOMM is Traffic. Too much distance now between interest in "ARES" and "Traffic"."

"NTS has a great reputation and past. I'd like to see the end to the junk messages from the few senders who do that. We've lost members due to them. In these days, it's ever more difficult to accomplish a level of participation, let alone deal with all the garbage messages. We pass them all here, but members just don't come back to the net. Also can't understand how some states can simply refuse to handle traffic from other states! Thanks"

"NTS nets and ARES/RACES are integrated in our section. More traffic of all kinds would help to exercise the system. More involvement of ARES members in day-to-day NTS"

operations would be very good training. Some ARES members do not understand the need for the NTS or for traffic-handling training."

"There needs to be less competition and more cooperation between ARES and NTS. I see the biggest rub as the ICS-213. Locally, NTS radiograms are shut out of ARES nets, and while some in NTS feel the 213 should be reciprocally shut out of NTS, there needs to be clear guidance on how NTS will handle the 213. The "New" MPG Chapter 6 looks pretty good, but needs to be incorporated into the rest of the NTS modes. If nothing else, there needs to be an opportunity to "practice" converting 213's to the Radiogram format and vice-versa. Difficult to do when one group shuts out the other."

We now continue our task of evaluating our survey results.

On a personal note, I will be leaving the ECAC chairmanship on January 1 to assume the post as Great Lakes Div. Vice Director. I wish to express my most sincere thanks to the ECAC Committee members for their outstanding service on the committee, and to the PSC and the Board for this opportunity to have served.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dale Williams".

Dale Williams, WA8EFK, Chairman