

Date: Tue, 24 May 2005 16:53:08 -0700 (PDT)
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Subject: R.A.C.E.S E-LETTER

We are counting down the days to the official start of hurricane season.

I have been going through regulatory material, the archives and files at the RACES office in the EOC, and I have been meeting with knowledgeable people about the history, problems and future direction of the Charlotte County RACES.

For those members who are not aware the following FEMA website provides the guidance for RACES organizations: <http://www.fema.gov/library/civilpg.shtm>
I am attempting to apply applicable provisions of this document to the Charlotte County operation, to include (in part) appointment, in writing, of a RACES officer, as well as scheduling weekly, rather than monthly drills and exercises.

I envision the tactical net (first Wednesday of the month at 10 AM (9:30 Englewood), operational nets (8 PM Wednesday) 2nd and 4th week, and a training and certification day for the third Wednesday

In the future, nets should test our capabilities to perform in the event of a real emergency; consequently, each net should focus on some aspect of communicating in an emergency

Mr. Mallett of the EOC has agreed to provide Incident Command System training in June--my tentative date: June 22, 14:30 hours at the EOC conference room near the airport. I will let you know if that date is a "GO".

Other training topics in the works are message handling, Clear Voice Communication, The County's 800MHz system, Other Agency Communications, Professional Conduct, Generating a report or request for assistance, and help in operation/function of radios (QSY, Frequency/offset programming ,etc.). We are looking to "certify" all volunteers in critical areas of operation and maintain records so that we can train new people and be certain of the capabilities of current members. As we learn about problems or deficits, we will be adding or modifying training. Our concern for the time being is RACES. Later on, I hope to have a viable and robust ARES capability to include SET, etc. (please contact me if any of these terms are not understood).

In July, I propose to hold a general membership meeting (venue TBD).

Some upcoming changes:

We need to update the call down roster soon.

We are going to redo the RACES membership form and ask for members to complete it. The model for the new form is used in Lee County and provides more information that allows for the flexible use and assignment of volunteers.

I would like to investigate cooperative agreements for support with the adjoining RACES groups in Northport, Arcadia, and Fort Myers.

I would like to have a viable rapid response team that would volunteer to help for outside of region emergencies (we could learn much from such efforts).

Our next operational net for Wednesday, May 25, 2005 8 PM will involve a QSY and recheck in. Instructions will be provided by the Net control.

for our next tactical net, I propose to develop an exercise where operators assigned to one location will be redirected to another location. This will test the flexibility in assigning operators to where they are needed in the event that a location is deemed unnecessary or non operational.

Other types of possible exercises include operating on generator power, battery power, emergency antenna, simplex operations, simplex relay, message accuracy, multiple nets/radios. Of course, other exercises will be added as we learn about our capabilities. I want to emphasize that RACES needs to have a high degree of flexibility and competency if we are to prove ourselves maximally useful to the community and the EOC and these proposed exercises seek to develop and enhance our emergency communication capabilities.

I would also like to find out about FEMA funding and grants. I do not see major equipment needs (I understand that Englewood is applying for an antenna grant), but we will do a needs analysis at some point, and I would like to have some training equipment like a video projector for presentations and training.

As you know, not all emergencies are declared under RACES. At the recent hurricane expo, I asked the local director of the Red Cross if the various emergency aid providers meet to discuss mutual support and coordination. Apparently, this has not happened in awhile, but she thought that such a meeting should take place and even offered to host it. Expect further news as developments occur, but our ARES operators could be an important element in supporting and coordinating the various organizations.

Finally, in my last emailing, I noted some disappointment on the part of the EOC that was related to me. I have no first hand experience but have been told a number of things that seemed to bear out at least some of the criticism. This criticism applied to the organization as a whole. I am told now of the feeling that the Englewood subset of RACES performed most admirably--showing up as requested, operating the stations for long hours and handling much traffic. Of course, the Englewood folks are to be commended and applauded as a group and as individuals (as should be all individuals who sacrificed of their time and effort). I have also been told that there has not really

been enough thanks conveyed to the Englewood EOC. As RACES is a volunteer effort, the only reward gotten is appreciation (and hopefully self-fulfillment) and appreciation certainly is not hard on anyone's budget. I note that a number of folks at the Lee County RACES/ARES received presidential and other honorifics based on the amount of time they spent on duty. I do not have data that would allow me to submit for these but if it is not too late and I get the data, I will try.

I will be sending out an email questionnaire to all members who participated in RACES/ARES during hurricane season. (Since not all members are getting emails and some have been dropped at their request, if you know of someone who participated but is not getting the emails, please have them contact me for the questionnaire. Earthlink members who do not accept mail need to add my email to the approved list. I tried using the earthlink protocol to send them an invite message but the message is repeatedly rejected by earthlink). I am going to ask on what dates/times you served, where you were posted and approximately how many messages you handled and, if you can, break down the message types by content. I also will ask for a narrative statement about your experience, whether you felt it was really useful, valuable, necessary, etc. and what could have been done better and why. The responses will not only let me know who did what and for how long, it will also be provided to the EOC (who indicated that they were not aware of the contributions of the Englewood section). The data will also present a picture of what types of communications occurred, what traffic patterns were like and may help us plan and allocate for the future.

Concerning the Englewood group as an entity, it was suggested by one consultant that some of the positions that the main EOC felt important to occupy (and weren't) could have been handled by Englewood operators had they been called in. We probably need to discuss/work on that issue as a command and control option to be looked at.

Admittedly, what I am trying to achieve is somewhat ambitious; that is, proposing quite a few changes and asking for an increase in the amount of volunteer effort and commitment as well as asking the EOC (busy as they are) to include us as a supporting actor to their efforts. I can only try to do what needs to be done based upon the logical remediation of regulatory and operational issues as they have surfaced upon investigation. I am willing to expend whatever time and energy I have to accomplish this providing two things:(1) I get the support of the membership (at least a central corps component willing to commit to vital stations); (2) I get the active and interactive support of the EOC in developing and maintaining a RACES organization that is competent and respected. I look for progress and cooperation at a certain level in the coming months. But, I am a realist, and if I do not see the organization as moving in the right direction (in military parlance: a rock too hard to move), I will cut my losses and let someone else try. That said, I am optimistic that the membership will be energized and that we will prove ourselves to the EOC as valued and reliable professional communicators.

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MIKE MOSES