Stafford County Emergency Communications Team Plan

V1.0

The Stafford County Emergency Communications (EMCOMM) Team has a long history of supporting the citizens of Stafford County during hazardous weather and community outreach. The team is primarily made up of volunteer Amateur Radio (Ham) operators and their families who are also members of the Amateur Radio Emergency Service® (ARES®). The Amateur Radio Emergency Service, founded in 1935, encourages participation by any licensed Amateur Radio operator with a sincere interest in Public Service Communications. Like ARES which has evolved over the years to embrace a more uniformly functioning public safety support organization, the EMCOMM Team strives to evolve as well to provide a more capable tool for the Stafford County Emergency Manager. The Team does this by increasing their education, experience, and technical capabilities.

Members of the EMCOMM Team are a very diverse group coming from a wide variety of backgrounds, training, and experiences but all meld into a cohesive Team to support the County and its citizens. Over the years, the EMCOMM Team has provided communications support during hazardous weather events such as blizzards, tornado's, hurricane's, floods, derecho's, State and National exercises, power outages, and community events such as National Night Out and the Stafford Christmas Parade. The Team also provided vital communications support during the 9/11 attack.

The team is led by the ARES Emergency Coordinator and RACES Officer. Member participation and assignments vary depending on the individual training, skills, and availability. Assignments range from staffing the Emergency Operations Center (EOC), engineering support, deployed support, liaison duty, shelter staffing, and neighborhood support. Each of these assignments require, in addition to a valid FCC Amateur Radio License, specific training, experience, and in the case of the EOC credentialing.

Experience has proven that radio operators respond more capably in time of emergency when they have practiced in an organized group and have been certified in certain Emergency Communications skills. There is no substitute for experience gained before the need arises. Registration does not require possession of any specially designed equipment. All communicators can be of assistance to the local Emergency Manager, regardless of class of license, equipment owned, or personal circumstances.

Stafford County Emergency Communications Team Program

This program continues to evolve based on changes to the Stafford County Strategic Plan, modifications to ARES Guidelines, changes in technology, and changes to served partner agencies requirements. Stafford County Emergency Manager and EMCOMM Team Leadership will review this plan annually to ensure continued relevance.

The Stafford County Emergency Coordinator (EC) and Assistant Emergency Coordinator (AEC) will qualify and certify to the Stafford County Emergency Manager all members of the EMCOMM Team. The EC will recommend individuals for access to the Emergency Operations Center (EOC).

The Stafford County Emergency Manager may credential those individuals recommended by the EC for access to the EOC upon completing a successful background check.

The EC/AEC will ensure issue and maintain EMCOMM Team Members Emergency Communicator Individual Task Book.

Operational record keeping and reporting will be accomplished using ARES Connect.

Stafford County Emergency Manager provides all EMCOMM equipment (Radio's, Antenna's, Cables, and IT capabilities) utilized in the EOC, EMV, and Go Kits as required. Additionally, provide assistance in maintaining the antenna's used at the various repeater sites primarily dedicated to EMCOMM use and, secondarily, for use by local Amateur Radio (Ham) Operators supporting the County.

Stafford County Emergency Communications Team Mission Statement

The Stafford County EMCOMM Team provides a cadre of experienced Amateur Radio (Ham) operators skilled in the use of a wide range of emergency and disaster communications techniques who are committed to serving the citizens of Stafford County, surrounding jurisdictions, and the United States of America during times of emergency.

Stafford County Emergency Communications Team Vision Statement

The Stafford County EMCOMM Team strives to ensure communication gaps that occur due to natural or manmade emergencies that are filled by reliable, dedicated, and skilled emergency communications operators, ensuring Stafford County Emergency Management is capable to respond to and address any situation faced and provide a public service to the citizens of Stafford County.

Stafford County Emergency Communications Team Expertise, Capability, and Capacity

Expertise

The Stafford County EMCOMM Team is comprised of Amateur Radio (Ham) operators possessing unique communications and technical skills. These skills include but are not limited to the operation of radio equipment on a wide range of frequencies with varying propagation conditions, ability to construct and deploy communications antenna's specifically designed to operate under challenging conditions, setup and operate field stations, and using non-conventional means of getting a message through when other systems are overloaded or have failed.

Capability

The Stafford County EMCOMM Team have actively engaged in the following steps so that they have the ability to perform certain actions and meet their objectives. Further, a goal of the ARES program is to ensure that program participants continue to improve and develop additional capabilities for serving the needs of partners.

Weekly communications nets are held to develop and enhance operations and traffic passing. These nets provide experience in on-the-air operating, including net procedures and routines that are easily learned and adopted. Experience resulting from regular net participation ensures that established procedures and routines for net participation become rote practices for participants.

The Team participates in various events such as DXing (contacting distant stations), which offers ways of improving skills in operating under adverse conditions like interference, static, weather, and propagation limitations. These skills involved in copying transmissions subject to severe noise levels or interference come only through the actual experience of operating under severe conditions. Contacting DX stations, even occasionally, offers the unique experience necessary for skill level improvement.

Team members regularly participate in "contesting events" also known as Radio-sport which teaches ways to operate with a fixed format at high contact rates. Learning a fixed routing plan and employing common practices and terminology sets the expectations for network participants so they can anticipate the procedures used by the net and more readily adapt to the net routines.

Effective exercises offer locally developed scenarios to practice for hazards and threats. Having an established written policy relating to the most likely emergency scenarios allows ARES participants to understand the procedures for activating for a given situation. Severe weather events may be quite different from a wildfire, for example, requiring contact with different agencies and different skill sets from ARES participants. A well-written emergency communication plan greatly simplifies activation procedures and ensures that smaller items are not inadvertently overlooked.

Emergency and disaster response provide experience with actual pressures and changing requirements found in such environments. Having the opportunity to participate in emergency or disaster response offers one with valuable lessons and experiences. Therefore, it is important for

those involved in the response to participate in the After-Action Reports (AAR) and debriefing process, so that all participants can learn from those who have operated in emergency conditions. Careful attention to details and retention of notes is an important part of completing this important educational task.

Capacity

The EMCOMM Team continuously strives to expand their capacity for supporting the County by:

1. Utilization of effective communications methodologies, including
   - Various available field resources for communicating, such as VHF, UHF, HF, repeaters, accepted simplex frequencies, and local/regional HF networks
   - Integrating messaging networks such as high-speed multimedia (HSMM) networks, the National Traffic System (NTS), and NTS-Digital (NTSD), along with new technology and data communications, and
   - Cross-training with other communications services such as Salvation Army Team Emergency Radio Network (SATERN), Military Auxiliary Radio Service (MARS), and local public safety.
2. Engagement with the Community through
   - Working with state and local officials
   - Participation in neighborhood programs
   - Cooperating with local CERT, National Weather Service SKYWARN, and similar programs, and
   - Assisting with community events, such as rallies, races, marathons, parades, all of which create training opportunities and team building.

The Team's expertise, capability, and capacity are developed and refined through thorough training that is formal or informal, and often in conjunction with local agencies where the team can meet the individuals with whom they can expect to be operating during a true emergency. This effort is a strong contributor to developing mutual trust and understanding among the key individuals managing any emergency operation, and should be exercised at every opportunity.

Qualifications for Membership in Stafford County Emergency Communications Team

The basic qualification for all members of the EMCOMM Team is a valid Amateur Radio license issued by the Federal Communications Commission and the commitment to participate to the level they are capable of during EMCOMM Team activations. In addition to this basic qualification three distinct levels of qualification have been developed which borrow from the current ARES qualification levels with minor adjustments which specifically relate to Stafford County EMCOMM Team requirements. These three levels are detailed below and are highly encouraged for those wishing to expand their capabilities and knowledge as well as ability to be assigned to particular positions within the Team:

Level 1 — is the entry level for those who choose to participate in the EMCOMM Team and be assigned as deployed Team operators or EOC operators under supervision. This is a non-leadership role and has been designed for those new to Amateur Radio or emergency communications. This introductory training is conducted by members of the Stafford County EMCOMM Team as well as self-paced online courses designed to meet the needs of served agency or partners. Level 1 training requirements are outlined and documented in the Stafford County Emergency Communications Team & ARES Standardized Training Plan – Emergency Communicator Individual Task Book. Participation in at least one weekly net each month is required to demonstrate proper radio net procedures.

Level 2 — is the mid-level standard qualification allowing Team members to be assigned to positions of greater responsibility such as the EOC, deployed team lead, and shelter lead. Level 2 training requirements are outlined and documented in the Stafford County Emergency Communications Team & ARES Standardized Training Plan – Emergency Communicator Individual Task Book and at no cost to the individual. Team members are also encouraged to take advantage of training opportunities available through partners to enhance their knowledge and skill set. Participation in at least two weekly net each month is required to demonstrate proper radio net procedures one as the Net Control Station (NCS) or Back up Net Control Station (BNCS).

Level 3 — is the leadership level for those who choose fill the duties. These leadership billets include EC, ADEC, DEC, ASEC, and SEC, and other designated positions in the ARES program. Level 3 training requirements are outlined and documented in the Stafford County Emergency Communications Team & ARES Standardized Training Plan – Emergency Communicator Individual Task Book and at no cost to the individual. Team members are also encouraged to take advantage of training opportunities available through partners to enhance their knowledge and skill set. Participation in at least two weekly net each month is required to demonstrate proper radio net procedures one as the Net Control Station (NCS) or Back up Net Control Station (BNCS).

Completion of all training programs will be verified by the Emergency Coordinator (EC) or Assistant Emergency Coordinator (AEC) before the participant advances to the higher level. Those individuals holding leadership positions must complete new requirements within one (1) year of being introduced.

Stafford County Emergency Communications (EMCOMM) Team Leadership\Staff Positions

The Stafford EMCOMM Team, is the local operational component of the ARES program. They are led by an individual designated as the Emergency Coordinator (EC). It is the EC who is most familiar with the needs of his or her community, familiar with the local hazards and threats, topography, weather expectations, natural resources, and available community resources. It is the EC who maintains contact with the public safety leaders, as well as partners and their leadership.

The Stafford EMCOMM Team is comprised several permanent leadership\staff positions as well as several other positions that are task organized, equipped, and led based on the specific County Emergency Managers need. Each position has specific duties, responsibilities, and requirements based on the tasks and impact of the position. All leadership\staff positions are voluntary but require a commitment in time and effort.

The following position descriptions are detailed below:

Stafford County EMCOMM Team Lead \ Emergency Coordinator (EC)

The Stafford County EMCOMM Team Lead is also the ARRL Emergency Coordinator responsible for the ARES group at the local level. They working with local community officials, the Section Emergency Coordinator (SEC), and other field appointees, the EC leads his or her local ARES group through the planning, preparedness, and response phases.

Requirements

Technician-class license or higher; full ARRL membership, and achievement of Level 3 qualifications.

Responsibilities

> Promote and enhance the activities of the Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES) for the benefit of the public as a voluntary, non-commercial communications service.
> Manage and coordinate the training, organization, and emergency participation of interested amateurs working in support of the communities, agencies, or functions designated by the Section Emergency Coordinator (SEC)/Section Manager (SM).
> Establish viable working partnerships with federal, state, county, city governmental and/or private agencies in the ARES jurisdictional area that needs the services of ARES in emergencies.
> Identify and work collaboratively with local partners to assess how ARES can assist them with their mission, ensuring partners are aware of the limitations and capabilities of ARES.
> Develop detailed local operational plans, with partner agency officials in the jurisdiction that set forth precisely what expectations are during an ARES activation. Work jointly with partners to establish relationships based on mutual trust and respect. All matters involving recruitment and utilization of ARES participants are directed by the EC, in response to the needs assessed by the

Agency officials. Technical issues involving message format, security of message transmission, disaster welfare inquiry policies, and others, should be reviewed and expounded upon in the ARES detailed local operations plans.

Establish local communications networks that run on a regular basis, and periodically test those networks by conducting realistic drills.

Work with the SEC and District Emergency Coordinators (DECs) to identify potential local shortcomings and define resources that may need to be drawn from adjacent ARES groups in support of a local emergency or disaster.

Establish an emergency traffic plan, with welfare traffic inclusive, utilizing the National Traffic System (NTS) as one active component for traffic handling. Establish an operational liaison with local and section nets, particularly for handling welfare traffic in an emergency situation.

Work with other Amateur Radio public service groups, organizations or programs to establish relationships of mutual trust and respect, and a coordination mechanism for the good of the public and Amateur Radio. The goal is to foster an efficient and effective Amateur Radio response overall.

Work for growth in the local ARES program, making it a stronger, more valuable resource and hence able to meet more of the agencies' local needs.

Actively use ARES Connect to manage group personnel, schedule events and generate activities reports with the SM and ARRL Headquarters. Promote use of ARES Connect among all ARES group participants. Provide timely reporting of emergency and public safety communications rendered in the Section for potential inclusion in ARRL media relations activities.

Appoint one Assistant Emergency Coordinator.

Stafford County EMCOMM Team Deputy \ Assistant Emergency Coordinator (AEC)

The Stafford County EMCOMM Team Deputy is also the ARRL Assistant Emergency Coordinator (AEC) appointed at the option of the Emergency Coordinator (EC), to assist the EC with his or her local ARES group through the planning, preparedness, and response phases of the ARES mission at the local level.

Requirements

Technician-class license or higher and achievement of Level 1 qualifications.

Responsibilities

As defined and assigned by the EC in support of the EC's responsibilities described above.

Stafford County EMCOMM Team Technical Lead

The Stafford County EMCOMM Team Technical Lead is a unique position not related to the ARRL or ARES but is appointed at the option of the Stafford County EMCOMM Team Lead to assist the EMCOMM Team leadership with the design, operations, and maintenance of Amateur Radio (Ham) equipment used in emergency communications support to the County.

Requirements

Technician-class license or higher and a high degree of RF and data communications experience and acumen.

Responsibilities

Maintain Amateur Radio (Ham) equipment used in emergency communications support to the County.

Select and train individuals capable of assisting in the installation, maintenance, and operation of Amateur Radio (Ham) equipment used in emergency communications support to the County.

Stafford County EMCOMM Team County Liaison

The Stafford County EMCOMM Team County Liaison is a unique position not related to the ARRL or ARES but is appointed at the option of the Stafford County EMCOMM Team Lead to assist the EMCOMM Team leadership with the coordination of specific County support to the EMCOMM Team.

Requirements

Technician-class license or higher and a high degree of RF and data communications experience and acumen.

Responsibilities

Coordinate frequency assignments.

Coordinate call sign designations.

Address all interoperability issues effecting or having the potential to effect EMCOMM Team support to Stafford County Emergency Management.

Stafford County Emergency Communications (EMCOMM) Team Operational Assignments

Members of the Stafford EMCOMM Team are operationally assigned based on the need of the response and the requirements of the individuals filling these positions. The position requirements are based either on ARES directives which are derived from the National Incident Management System (NIMS) or County policy. Operational assignments are key in the EMCOMM Teams response as these individuals are the first line of support to the community.

The following Operational position descriptions are detailed below:

Stafford County Emergency Operations Center

The Stafford County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is one of the most demanding positions supported by the EMCOMM Team. Individuals assigned to the EOC provide not only back-up communications support but also ensure communications to deployed teams, Local and State EMCOMM nets accessible and communications traffic is accurately and efficiently transmitted and received.

Requirements

> General-class license or higher, a technician-class license operator can be assigned as long as a general-class operator is also present to operate the HF station if\when required.
> County background check
> Completion of FEMA online training courses ICS 100, 200, 700 and 800.

Responsibilities

> Operate and maintain primary and alternate Amateur Radio voice communications equipment
> Operate and maintain primary and alternate Amateur Radio data communications equipment
> Establish and maintain Amateur Radio communications links to Stafford County Shelters when activated and manned
> Establish and maintain Amateur Radio communications links with local hospitals
> Establish and maintain Amateur Radio communications links to deployed members of the Stafford EMCOMM Team
> Transmit and Receive all messages directed to be processed
> Monitor and operate County provided communications equipment as directed
> Maintain EOC Radio Room ICS log

Stafford County Emergency Shelter

The Stafford County Emergency Shelters are activated in response to specific needs such as Blizzard, Fire, Flood, or events that prevent a significant number of individuals and families returning to their homes. Individuals assigned to the shelters provide communications links directly to the EOC and other

activated EMCOMM deployed teams and liaison teams.

Requirements

Technician-class license or higher
County background check
Completion of FEMA online training courses ICS 100, 200, 700 and 800.

Responsibilities

Operate and maintain primary and alternate Amateur Radio voice communications equipment
Operate and maintain primary and alternate Amateur Radio data communications equipment
Establish and maintain Amateur Radio communications links to Stafford County EOC when activated and manned
Establish and maintain Amateur Radio communications links with local hospitals
Establish and maintain Amateur Radio communications links to deployed members of the Stafford EMCOMM Team
Transmit and Receive all messages directed to be processed
Monitor and operate County provided communications equipment as directed
Maintain Shelter ICS log
Upon deactivation ensure shelter ICS log is transmitted to and received by the EOC

Stafford County EMCOMM Deployed Support Team

The Stafford County Emergency deployed support teams are activated in response to specific needs as a result of natural or manmade disasters. Individuals assigned to the deployed support teams provide communications links directly to the EOC, shelters, liaison teams, and other activated EMCOMM deployed teams.

Requirements

Technician-class license or higher
County background check
Completion of FEMA online training courses ICS 100, 200, 700 and 800.

Responsibilities

Operate and maintain primary and alternate Amateur Radio voice communications equipment
Operate and maintain primary and alternate Amateur Radio data communications equipment
Establish and maintain Amateur Radio communications links to Stafford County EOC when activated and manned
Establish and maintain Amateur Radio communications links with local hospitals
Establish and maintain Amateur Radio communications links to deployed members of

the Stafford EMCOMM Team
Transmit and Receive all messages directed to be processed
Monitor and operate County provided communications equipment as directed
Maintain Shelter ICS log
Upon deactivation ensure shelter ICS log is transmitted to and received by the EOC

Stafford County EMCOMM Liaison Support Team

The Stafford County EMCOMM liaison support teams are activated in response to specific needs as a result of natural or manmade disasters. Individuals assigned to the liaison support teams provide liaison support as required and report directly to the EOC.

Requirements

Technician-class license or higher
County background check

Responsibilities

Coordinate support between EOC EMCOMM Team and agency requiring or desiring support.
Act as liaison between agency emergency response teams and EOC EMCOMM Team.