



# Jackson County ARES Operations Manual

---

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this plan is to provide procedures for Jackson County Amateur Radio Emergency Service members in handling emergency communications in Jackson County. Jackson County ARES provides the organizational framework for the Jackson County Emergency Response Net (herein after referred to as the "Jackson County ARES Net" or "Net"). Participation in Net operations is open to any licensed amateur radio operator whether a member of ARES or not.

## 2.0 GENERAL INFORMATION

The Jackson County ARES Net holds weekly training sessions on the 146.90 MHz repeater each Thursday night at 7:30pm local time.

The organizational structure for activation and operation of the Net along with training falls under the scope of the Jackson County ARES. Group meetings are normally held on a monthly basis and at the Jackson County EOC. Announcement of these meetings is given on the weekly net training sessions, at the Jackson county Amateur Radio Club meetings, and the JCAR web site. These meetings are open and encouraged to all who share an interest in serving their community during disasters. Various training programs are given at these meetings ranging from weather spotting to traffic handling. ARES members are encouraged to attend any training courses offered by the National Weather Service or any other local emergency response agency.

### **3.0 NET ACTIVATION**

Activation of the Jackson County Emergency Net shall be determined by the type and severity of the event to be addressed. There are four levels of alert for Jackson County ARES Net operations ranging from 0 to 3 with 0 being the lowest alert status and 3 being the highest. Each ascending level brings the net into an increasing level of alert. The Net Control Station or the ARES Emergency Coordinator determines the degree of net alert status, or an Assistant Emergency Coordinator based upon the type of emergency situation that exists or may exist.

For civil emergencies and preparedness events, the requesting agency shall contact the ARES Emergency Coordinator who shall then coordinate the necessary response for the event. The EC or one of the AEC's shall designate a responsible NCS to activate the Jackson County Net to the appropriate level of alert based upon the severity of the event.

### **3.1 ACTIVATION LEVELS**

#### **3.1.1 Level 0**

Normal, NON-emergency conditions exist in Jackson County. At this level there will be no activation of the Jackson County Emergency Net and repeater use shall be normal. Net members shall maintain routine preparedness for emergency activity and monitor regular media outlets for weather-related or other emergency information, should net activation be needed.

### **3.1.2      Level 1**

Preparedness level: possible worsening of conditions in Jackson County, or immediate surrounding counties. Upon knowledge of a Level 1 event ARES members are to begin monitoring the 146.90 Mhz repeater. Discretion is advised in the formation of any Net operations at this level until such time as conditions worsen in Jackson County or surrounding areas. A responsible Net Control Station, or designee, shall determine the need to open the Net. Upon that determination, the NCS shall announce the formation of an ***informal (non-directed)*** net operation for the purpose of emergency-preparedness, and will take Net check-ins as time permits, per the Preamble directives. Net participants should minimize transmissions and informally report significant events during this period.

Activation of a Level 1 Alert is indicated by:

SEVERE THUNDERSTORM WATCH for Jackson County or immediately surrounding counties

WINTERSTORM WATCH for North Alabama

### **3.1.3 Level 2**

Preparedness/Action level: possible life threatening or damaging conditions may occur in Jackson County and may be in progress in immediate surrounding counties. The NCS in a Level 2 event will designate liaison operators to help maintain the flow of information and make sure it gets to the correct agency. Net operations will be in an **informal (non-directed) manner**. Contact should be made with the EC and or the AEC's in order to insure that operations during the event will be correctly organized and managed. The EC or AEC's will determine the need for additional manpower to fulfill needs during the event. ARES members should have, ready at hand, their disaster kit in case they are called on to help a county agency needing additional communications help. All operators shall minimize transmission lengths and report significant events and status at the request of the NCS. At the discretion of the NCS, a **Directed Net** may be opened in a Level 2 Alert if the situation warrants this action.

Activation of a Level 2 Alert is indicated by:

- TORNADO WATCH for Jackson County \*
- WINTER STORM Warning for Jackson County
- SEVERE THUNDERSTORM WARNING for Jackson County \*\*

\*When a TORNADO WATCH is issued for North Alabama at least one qualified ARES member will need to staff the station at the Jackson County EOC located in the Jackson county Court House. The EC and AEC's shall make the determination if a member is qualified to operate the EOC station during a Level 2 Alert on the basis of past experience, attitude, and ability to work under stress.

\*\* Activation of the EOC during a SEVERE THUNDERSTORM WARNING will be at the discretion of the EMA. We will not activate on every warning unless needed.

### **3.1.4 Level 3**

Emergency Action level: LIFE-THREATENING conditions are about to occur, or are occurring or have just occurred in Jackson County or in immediate surrounding areas. When a Level 3 Alert condition exists the Net NCS will immediately establish a **DIRECTED NET OPERATION**, and conduct it per the established Preamble for Net activation. Operators shall maintain radio silence unless they have EMERGENCY or vital traffic. Operators shall keep any transmission short and to the point so as not to hinder anyone with EMERGENCY traffic. A **DIRECTED NET** shall remain in effect during the recovery phase if needed to support any emergency response agency.

Activation of a Level 3 Alert is indicated by, but not limited to the following emergencies:

- TORNADO WARNING for Jackson County
- TORNADO WARNING for the HSV NWS Coverage area in which the county with minimal weather will be needed to manage the SKYWARN Net
- EARTHQUAKE causing damage within Jackson County
- WILDFIRE in Jackson County
- PLANE CRASH within Jackson County
- RADIOLOGICAL DISASTER transportation accident involving release of radioactive material within Jackson County
- CHEMICAL SPILL requiring evacuation of residents
- TERRORIST ATTACK in Jackson County
- ENEMY ATTACK on the United States of America

#### **4.0 RADIO PROCEDURES DURING EMERGENCIES**

1. Identify yourself at the beginning of each transmission especially where confusion may result if omitted and at least once in a 10 minute operating period to meet FCC requirements.
2. When reporting an event, especially severe weather, make sure to include the exact location and time the event occurred.
3. Listen before transmitting. Be sure you are not on the air with someone else.
4. Know what you are going to say before you push the PTT button; in other words, engage your brain before you put your mouth in gear.
5. Hold the transmit button down for at least a second before beginning your message to insure that the first part of your message is not cut off.
6. TALK ACROSS THE FACE OF YOUR MICROPHONE. This technique makes the communications more understandable. In other words, hold the face of the microphone almost at a right angle to your face.
7. Speak slowly, distinctly, clearly, and do not let your voice trail off at the end of words or sentences. Give each and every word equal force. For some this takes a lot of practice and conscious effort but do it.
8. Notify Net Control if you are operating cross-band. This will let the NCS know they need to allow additional time between key-up and speaking when communicating with you.
9. Never acknowledge calls or instructions unless you understand the call or instructions perfectly. If you do not understand, ask for a repeat.
10. When you have understood the message, acknowledge the receipt with the words "copy", "received" or "acknowledged." The word "copy" is preferred and NEVER the word "QSL."

11. The word "break" is never used UNLESS there is an emergency. Give your call letters to gain access to a net.

12. Always acknowledge calls and instructions. Nothing is more disruptive to the smooth flow of communications than dead silence in response to a message. If you cannot copy or respond to the call immediately, then tell the caller to say again or stand by. Otherwise, acknowledge each call immediately.

13. Under stress, many operators have a tendency to talk too fast. ACCURACY FIRST, SPEED SECOND.

14. At times, radio conditions are poor and words must be overly exaggerated to be understandable. In general, speak very slowly and distinctly to carry through static and weak signals.

15. If you are relaying a message for another person, be sure you understand it. If it makes no sense to you, get an explanation before you put it on the air. If necessary, refer the message back to the originator for clarifications.

16. There is no place for "Q" signals during official and emergency communications. They are too easily misunderstood, rarely save time, and often result in errors.

17. Do not act as a relay station unless Net Control, or another radio station, asks for a relay -- and you can fulfill the requirement with your station.

18. When transmitting numbers (house numbers, street numbers, telephone numbers, etc.), always transmit number sequences as a series of individual numbers. Never say numbers in combinations.

19. If a proper name needs to be transmitted, always spell it out using the ICAO phonetic alphabet. Do not use cute or self-invented phonetics. There is no place for them in official and emergency communications. Avoid using the phrase "common spelling" to reduce confusion.

20. ONLY TRANSMIT FACTS. If your message is a question, deduction, educated guess, or hearsay, identify it as such. Do not clutter up the air with non-essential information. Be careful what you say on the air. There are many ears listening. Many facts may be taken out of context even when carefully identified.

21. If you do not understand the whole message given to you or if you missed a word out of the transmission, reply with "Say again." Do not say "please repeat" because it sounds too much like the word "received" when conditions are poor.

22. Chewing gum, eating, and other activities with items in the mouth tend to clutter up the clarity of your speech. Don't.

23. Avoid angry comments on the air at all costs. Obscene statements are not necessary and are out of place in all communications.

24. Sound alert. Nothing destroys confidence as much as a bored or weary sounding radio operator. If you are tired, get a relief operator.

25. During an incident, communications suffer enough confusion without wisecracks and jokes. Amateur Radio may be a hobby to enjoy, but when providing Emergency Communications you must remember that it is a serious situation and should be treated as such at all times.

26. Stay off the air unless you are sure you can be of assistance. It does no good to offer advice, assistance, comments or other input to a net unless you can truly provide clarification. It is better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt!

27. Always know your location. If you are mobile or portable and moving around, always keep a sharp lookout for landmarks. You must be able, if called upon, to accurately describe your location at any time. This is particularly important if you are with a search team or other mobile units.

28. On VHF and UHF frequencies, particularly when on the fringes of communications, look for a receiving "hot spot" site and use it. Don't walk around talking while in a communications fringe area. Repeaters have much more transmitting power than your handheld. Even if you have a good signal from a repeater, it does not mean you are received well by the repeater.



29. If you check into an emergency net, you must monitor on the net frequency. If you must leave the frequency, ask permission from the NCS. Report to the NCS when you return to the net. It is vital that the NCS know the availability of each station on the net and it is up to YOU to keep the NCS advised. However, if the NCS is very busy and you must leave the net, do so without interrupting the net.

30. Net Control Stations frequently are very busy with work that is not on the air. If you call the NCS or dispatcher and do not get a reply, be patient and call again in a minute or two. If you have an emergency, say you have "Emergency traffic" after you identify yourself when you call the NCS. Be patient with the NCS and other stations.

31. A mobile radio (that is one that is mobile, portable, or airborne) has priority over any other type of radio station AND other forms of telecommunications. This is true in all radio services. Fixed station operators must recognize that a call from a mobile station takes precedence over telephone calls, personal conversations, and other activities. Respond promptly to any call from a mobile station – even if it is to advise the caller to standby.

In conclusion, these few rules and suggestions are intended to help you become a better operator – whether Public Safety or Amateur Radio. Analyze your present operating methods and try to polish each element so your participation in radio communications is professional and worthwhile. Your Net Control Station operator may have the final authority but good, clean operating methods and procedures almost make a net run without an NCS.

## **5.0 ORGANIZATIONAL INTERFACES**

Functional interfaces and liaisons shall be established with the following local agencies and Amateur Radio response units, for the purpose of enhancing the functionality of service to Jackson County:

- Jackson County Emergency Management Agency
- North Alabama SKYWARN
- National Weather Service

## **6.0 OPERATION AT THE EOC**

The EOC activates when a SEVERE THUNDERSTORM WATCH has been issued for North Alabama. Jackson County ARES will activate at the EOC beginning with a TORNADO WATCH or sooner if the EMA requests. The Jackson County Net will be in Level 3 Alert status when this occurs. At least one qualified operator will be required to staff the station at the EOC located at the EMA Office in the Jackson County Courthouse. The EC and or the AEC's will make the management decisions of who should operate the station during the event. The EC or AEC's will also coordinate relief operators for long events. A qualified operator is determined by their participation in Net practice, attitude, dependability, maturity, ability to operate in a stressful environment, and their experience from any other severe weather events.

The operator staffing the station at the EOC should set up the VHF/UHF radios to monitor the 147.90, 147.09, and the 442.250 repeaters. The HF station should be tuned to 3.965KHz. Operations from the EOC position will primarily serve as a relay point between the various nets and to gather information for the EOC to base their responses.