
Auxcomm

Auxcomm WG 1Q16

Update on the status of the Auxcomm Working Group



The Auxcomm Working Group

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Abstract

The Auxcomm Working Group has been meeting regularly since December. The group is focusing on articulating in some detail the capabilities of the various services, and ensuring that necessary public safety officials know how to activate the various services and under what circumstances.

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1. Introduction

Volunteer communicators have long assisted local and state officials with backup communications. In 2012, Michigan began an effort, modeled after the FEMA Auxcomm initiative, to organize the various volunteer agencies into a single, auxiliary communications unit. FEMA has since recognized the AUXCOMM as a component of the communications unit within ICS.

In late 2015, the Michigan Interoperable Communications Board established an Auxcomm Working Group and named John McDonough and Marc Breckenridge as co-chairs. Marc is the Emergency Management Coordinator for Washtenaw County, and John is the Auxcomm Emergency Management Coordinator for the state, as well as the ARES® Section Emergency Coordinator and State RACES Officer.

The co-chairs concluded that the working group needed representation from each of the MSP EMHSD Districts, as well as from each of the services providing volunteer communications. After recruiting these representatives, the working group had its first online meeting in December. The group has since met online each month, and in person at the Interop conference in February.

2. Membership

The membership of the working group consists of a representative from each of the services, as well as a representative from each District.

Service Representatives

- **ARES®** - Larry Camp - Michigan Section Manager
- **Civil Air Patrol** - Maj. Shawn Wyant - Director, Communications
- **Emergency Management** - Marc Breckenridge - Director of Emergency Services, Washtenaw County - co-chair
- **MARS** - Cortland Richmond - State Communications Director
- **RACES** - John McDonough - State Auxcomm Emergency Management Coordinator - co-chair
- **SATERN** - Chris Striebel - Assistant EDS Director

District Representatives

- **1** - Bruce Pollock - District Emergency Coordinator ¹
- **2** - Shanon Herron - District Emergency Coordinator
- **3** - Joe Tuscher - Assistant District Emergency Coordinator

¹ The Amateur Radio Emergency Services or ARES® has positions known as Emergency Coordinator or EC and District Emergency Coordinator or DEC. This can cause some confusion with the titles of county Emergency Management Coordinators sometimes referred to as EMs and MSP District Coordinators or DCs.

- 5 - Carl Flickinger - District Emergency Coordinator
- 6 - James Duram - Emergency Coordinator Muskegon, Emergency Management Coordinator Oceana
- 7 - Thomas Duggan - District Emergency Coordinator
- 8 - Pete Costa - District Emergency Coordinator

3. Objectives

Our first objective following membership development was to prioritize the work group's activities. Three key objectives were identified as overarching priorities, followed by several additional objectives that would support Auxcomm over the long-term.

1. Conduct an Auxcomm Capability Assessment (**Priority**)
2. Development of Auxcomm Activation Protocols (**Priority**)
3. Operationalize Auxcomm technology in the new SEOC (**Priority**)
4. Support Michigan legislation which codifies the Federal Communications Commission PRB-1 ruling
5. Promote Volunteer COM-L development
6. Update SEOC documentation to reflect Auxcomm capabilities and changes for the new SEOC
7. Update the Michigan Emergency Management Plan to include Auxcomm

4. First quarter progress

The Working Group held three online meetings during the first quarter and one in-person meeting at the Michigan Statewide Interoperable Communications Training Conference. Additional work was handled via electronic mail and telephone. This section outlines the progress from those meetings.

4.1. Capabilities

One of the major challenges within Auxcomm is communicating with stakeholders the capabilities of the services. MARS and CAP are very much statewide, with no local organization, and thus fairly have consistent capabilities across the state. SATERN has a few local components, but not a very large number and again, fairly consistent capabilities. ARES®/RACES, on the other hand, has a unique presence in each county. Each county has a set of capabilities unique to the needs and resources of that county, making a concise description of the capabilities challenging.

There are a large number of technical capabilities, but for the most part, these are simple to describe. However, being composed of volunteers with differing levels of availability, training and capabilities, describing the human capabilities will be challenging.

Since the consumers of these services (primarily county emergency management coordinators) are likely to be using **MI-CIMS** at the time they need the services, that seems like the place the capabilities should be described. With the plan to export **CASM** data to **MI-CIMS**, and with **CASM** being basically designed for this purpose, it seems like that might be a solution for capturing the technical side of the capabilities.

For the volunteer side, the Working Group concluded that an online form that could be updated easily by local emergency coordinators provides a good way to capture resource availability, in a more granular fashion than the monthly ARES® reporting (refer to [Appendix A, ARES® Monthly Reporting Form](#)). A form ([Appendix B, Human Capabilities Data Entry Form](#)) has been proposed as a basis for this web form.

4.2. Activation

Traditionally, each of the organizations participating in the Auxcomm initiative follow discreet and unique activation procedures based on policies established by their parent agencies or leadership teams. This

individualized approach makes resource availability difficult to comprehend for any municipal or county Emergency Operations Center in Michigan. The Auxcomm Working Group was quick to recognize this, however a solution to this problem is neither quick or easy.

Development of an easy to follow Capability Assessment, combined with a simple Activation Protocol for the resources listed, would be an essential tool when communicating or "marketing" what Auxcomm can provide to emergency responder organizations throughout the state.

The Working Group has discussed this challenge in depth and recognizes the difficulty in developing of a standardized system for activation of all Auxcomm resources. We've established that the best approach will be to simplify the activation process as much as possible and to align the activation protocol with the capability assessment. This will then become our primary marketing instrument.

4.3. Operationalize new SEOC

Some progress on the new SEOC has been made but work is far from complete:

1. Shelving and furniture - Some furniture is in place, but vendor issues resulted in last-minute changes. Currently workspaces are in place but shelving is incomplete and modification to work surfaces to accommodate wiring is not complete.
2. Mounting/placing all radios - Key radios are in place allowing basic operation of the station but considerable work remains to be done.
3. Telephones and computers operational - Some telephones are operational and a single **MI-CIMS** station is operational. Packet and Pactor computers and additional telephones and **MI-CIMS** stations await completion of shelving and workspace modification.
4. Power and antenna wiring - Power and antenna wiring within the Auxcomm room are largely complete.
5. HF antenna installation - Of four HF antennas planned, none are complete. A single temporary antenna allowed operation during the REP drills at the beginning of Q2, but the condition of the ground has prevented additional work.
6. Pactor and Packet configuration - Pactor and packet configuration has not been started.
7. D-STAR configuration - Minimal D-STAR configuration has been carried over from the old SEOC allowing D-STAR to be a significant component of the Q2 drills, but considerable additional work is required.
8. MotoTrbo™ configuration - No progress has yet been made on configuring the MotoTrbo™ radio.
9. Updating SEOC procedures - The SEOC procedures have been updated, but the 2Q drills exposed additional opportunities. Since this document includes considerable contact information, it is updated frequently. A paper copy is kept in the SEOC, and an electronic copy has been added to **MI-CIMS**.
10. Updating radio operator procedures - This must wait until further progress has been made on the radio room.
11. HF Amplifier - Counties have often reported difficulty copying HF signals from the SEOC. An amplifier has been donated, but making this operational will require additional AC power and a more robust antenna tuner. No work is expected on this until Q3.

4.4. PRB-1 Committee Consultant

Legislation recently passed by the Michigan legislature, known as PRB-1, requires a committee to advise local jurisdictions on antenna restrictions. The Working Group was asked to recruit a representative to that Committee. The WG recommended Joseph Turner of Saginaw and he accepted.

4.5. Volunteer COM-L

Prior to the formation of the Working Group, the Auxcomm committee had a goal of recruiting a volunteer COM-L from each District. The Working Group elected to defer that goal until training becomes available.

4.6. Auxcomm SEOC Guide

The Auxcomm Emergency Management Coordinator joins the State Emergency Operations Center when activated. Each member of the SEOC has a guide outlining tasks required during activation. Formerly, Auxcomm was almost exclusively RACES and that guide reflected that.

The guide was updated to reflect all the Auxcomm services, including much information about notifying Federal services (MARS and CAP) which will become a component of the [Section 4.2, "Activation"](#) objective. That document includes much contact information and so is subject to frequent revision. During this update, it was recognized that further expansion would be desirable. ([Section 5.5, "Auxcomm SEOC Guide"](#).)

4.7. Interop

At the Michigan Statewide Interoperable Communications Training Conference, the working group had an opportunity for its first in-person meeting. The WG also presented three topics to the conference to expose the attendees to the concept and components of auxiliary communications and the Working Group plans. In addition, the WG was able to benefit from the input from Jerry Nummer on **CASM**, which could provide a key component of documenting the capabilities.

5. Future plans

5.1. Capabilities

In order to determine whether **CASM** will become a useful vehicle for capturing the technical capabilities, the team will enter the state's D-STAR network data into **CASM** and see if useful reports can be generated.

On the human side, the form in [Appendix B, Human Capabilities Data Entry Form](#) will be formatted for the web, pending further review by the Working Group. It is not anticipated this will "go live" until the third quarter.

5.2. Activation

The Working Group will determine whether a form used in the second District will be appropriate to our needs. Whether this form will be put on the web for Emergency Coordinators to use, or sent as a spreadsheet by electronic mail remains to be determined. Results are not likely until the fourth quarter.

5.3. Operationalize new SEOC

In the second quarter, the plan is to have completed all the items in [Section 4.3, "Operationalize new SEOC"](#), with the exception of the HF amplifier.

5.4. Volunteer COM-L

Presuming COM-L classes are scheduled later in the year as expected, the Working Group will recruit a volunteer from each District to take the training. The group will also ask Emergency Management Coordinators of nearby jurisdictions to consider providing opportunities for the candidates to complete their workbooks.

5.5. Auxcomm SEOC Guide

The group plans further updates to the SEOC guide. In particular, more detail is required in **MI-CIMS** responsibilities so that alternates who may not have frequent opportunities to serve at the SEOC may be more effective.

5.6. MEMP

In the second quarter, the working group will provide updates to the Michigan Emergency Management Plan to reflect the capabilities and organization of the combined services. Currently the MEMP only reflects ARES®/RACES.

5.7. Lupton

Each year in early July, ARES® holds an outing at a campground near Lupton. On the Saturday of the event a training conference is held for emergency coordinators from across the state. This year all Auxcomm services will be invited. Speakers include a COM-L, at least one (a second still tentative) representative from MSP, a number of county Emergency Management Coordinators, and several technical experts.

Topics will include the interaction between volunteer and professional responders, the new SEOC, the use of the ICS 217A and 205 in planning communications, and transmitting documents over radio.

A. ARES® Monthly Reporting Form

Element	Alcona												YTD	
	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December		
Members	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nets & Meetings														0
Net Meet Hours														0
Pub Svc Events														0
Pub Svc Hours														0
PS Evt Name 1														0
PS Evt Name 2														0
Em Ops														0
EmOp Hours														0
Em Op Name 1														0
Em Op Name 2														0
Admin Sessions														0
Admin Hours														0
Equip Sessions														0
Equip Hours														0
Miles														0
Travel Hours														0
Expenses														0
Authorized Submitting Call	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Nets, Events, Sessions	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Hours	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Contributed Value	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

B. Human Capabilities Data Entry Form

MICHIGAN AUXCOMM WORKING GROUP

Michigan ARPSC Annual Resource Assessment by County

Reporting County: _____ Michigan Region: _____

Your Name and Call Sign: _____

Total ARPSC personnel affiliated with your team: _____

Local Volunteer Availability Matrix

Please *estimate* the general availability of your volunteer team members. It is perfectly okay to report a "zero" in any of the categories listed. We are only looking for the most accurate count possible without requesting that each ARPSC volunteer in Michigan complete a questionnaire!

	ARES	RACES	V/UHF	HF	DIGITAL	NTS	NCS
Monday to Friday Days							
Monday to Friday Evenings							
Monday to Friday Nights							
Weekends							
Federally Observed Holidays							

Does your capability change significantly from season to season? If so, please explain.

Local Communications Resource Summary

	Frequency	Offset	Tone Encode	Tone Decode
Primary Repeater				
Secondary Repeater				
Simplex Frequency(s)				

Does your team utilize two meter or HF digital technology? If so, please explain.
