
Auxcomm

Auxcomm WG 3Q16

An update on the activities of the Auxcomm Working Group



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Abstract

The Auxcomm Working Group has continued to work at identifying the means to articulate our capabilities, and to communicate to stakeholders the process for activating the various services and the conditions under which they may be used.

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1. Introduction

The Auxiliary Communications Working Group has continued to meet monthly by telephone/web conference. Members of the group also communicate regularly via telephone, email and radio.

The past few months have been relatively uneventful, largely trying to document capabilities and explore the possibilities offered by CASM. This document details some of that work.

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. The NWS offices, which are "Districts" within ARES® but not within MSP are currently unrepresented.

Service Representatives

- **ARES®** - Larry Camp - Michigan Section Manager
- **Civil Air Patrol** - Maj. Shawn Wyant - Director, Communications
- **EMHSD** - Don Bouffard - Engineering Specialist - MSP/EMHSD
- **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 ²
- **5** - Carl Flickinger - District Emergency Coordinator
- **6** - James Duram - Emergency Coordinator Muskegon, Emergency Management Coordinator Oceana ³
- **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**)

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.

² Mister Tuscher will be leaving the working group effective September 1. He will most likely be replaced with the District Emergency Coordinator.

³ Mister Duram has a new job and will leave the working group when a replacement can be recruited.

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. Progress to date

The Working Group has continued to meet monthly. Occasional participation by others, especially Jim Jarvis from OEC, Jerry Nummer, Kate Janereth and Randy Williams from DTMB, has been quite helpful. Individual District committees have also continued to meet regularly. District 3 initiated an effort to get printers into the EOCs for data modes, and also developed a set of packet conventions to make this mode more consistent across the District.

4.1. Capability Assessment

The working Group has been exploring CASM as a tool for capturing the technical capabilities of volunteer communications. To date, most of the state's D-STAR sites have been captured in the tool. Only a few sites have complete detail.

At this point, CASM does not look like the tool for communicating our capabilities to our stakeholders. However, much of what is in CASM appears to be very useful for maintenance and planning. The RECCWG has emphasized CASM as the single database for communications assets, with other applications presenting CASM data in more useful ways.

4.2. Activation Protocols

Protocols for activating CAP and MARS are well understood. SATERN is a little different in that it is likely to be activated primarily in support of the Salvation Army's relief efforts, but we should communicate the long distance capabilities of SATERN so that EMS are aware.

ARES®/RACES activation is fairly consistent across the state, but because of the large number of jurisdictions, capturing precise contact points will take a survey, yet to be completed.

4.3. New SEOC

Work on making the new SEOC operational is continuing, delayed by activations and furniture acquisition. However, the new station was used in the Fermi series of REP exercises, and all the various voice modes, while not fully complete, are all operational, including HF and VHF/UHF analog radiotelephone, and D-STAR and DMR digital radiotelephone. The VHF packet station remains to be configured, and the HF packet antenna is not yet in place. NBEMS⁴ remains to be tested.

4.4. Support Legislation

No additional needs arose during the period.

⁴ Narrow-band Emergency Messaging System - a method of transmitting text, forms and other data using modes that are resilient to adverse band conditions.

4.5. COM-L

Training for COM-L and COM-T volunteers is still not available. However, an exercise was held to assist candidates in filling out their workbooks, and two Auxcomm members observed that exercise (thank you Kate Jannereth). That exercise was instructive.

4.6. SEOC Documentation

The SEOC representative documentation has been updated.

The new SEOC has attracted many more volunteers to work in the station during activations. There is still a need for additional staff but the new volunteers are welcome. However, with the additional operators and the ability to operate more modes, the need for improved documentation has increased markedly.

4.7. MEMP

Updates to the Michigan Emergency Management Plan to reflect Auxcomm were sent to the EMHSD planner. The planner is considering a different approach involving a number of workshops for the next update. Auxcomm has volunteered to participate in those workshops which have not yet been scheduled.

5. Future Plans

Capability Assessment

The Working Group will continue to get additional detail for some of the D-STAR repeaters in CASM to continue growing understanding of that tool. Once more data is available, the WG will look toward better understanding of the reporting and extract capabilities.

The recent power outage workshop highlighted the need for some more detailed information about key repeater sites across the state. A survey is being developed to capture that information from each of the counties. It is likely that information will also be included in CASM.

Some of the needed information is not provided for in CASM. The RECCWG also saw a need for those fields and will be requesting they be added. In the meanwhile, they will be included in the notes field.

The group serving the White Lake NWS office has several rather sophisticated repeater networks throughout the DTX CWA. The topic of getting that data into CASM has been discussed with that group and will further be explored in the coming months. An additional benefit is that one of the principals of that group is also a member of the Michigan Area Repeater Council, a group with detailed data on all the repeaters in the Lower Peninsula.

Activation Protocols

The group continues to collect details of the various contact points for activating individual organizations. It is hoped to complete this work by the end of the first quarter.

New SEOC

The following work remains to be complete in the new SEOC station:

- a. Complete installation of the 160 meter loop

- b. Identify and correct issues observed with some VHF/UHF antennas during the Fermi exercise
- c. Install the Pactor antenna
- d. Install and configure the Pactor equipment
- e. Install and configure the packet equipment
- f. Organize the various workspaces
- g. Make the CAP VHF station operational
- h. Validate the NBEMS capability
- i. Provide better documentation for operators of the SEOC station, especially for D-STAR, DMR and Pactor (all new capabilities).
- j. Explore and document the coverage of the new VHF/UHF antennas
- k. Determine how to make a CAP HF station a reality

A short test of transmitting pictures is planned between the SEOC and the St. Joseph county EOC for September 13th. This will provide a test of the NBEMS capability (h).

Every year ARES®/RACES conducts an exercise near the beginning of October. This year the exercise will exploit VHF/UHF relays.

MEMP

It is anticipated that the EMHSD planner will schedule some planning workshops for the coming quarter. Auxcomm intends to participate in those workshops as appropriate.

6. Individual Agency Activities

6.1. ARES/RACES

ARES® is a large organization which reports monthly, however, as a volunteer organization, reporting tends to be spotty. The following represent reported activities; undoubtedly many other activities are not included.

- ARES/RACES held its annual summer conference
- The SEOC and 2 county EOCs were activated for the Fermi REP exercises
- Most counties participated in the annual ARRL field day
- Ten SKYWARN activations were reported
- 36 public service events were supported
- 17 local exercises or training events were reported
- 6 search and rescue activations

- The group supporting the White Lake NWS office, in conjunction with Saginaw ARES, obtained a grant from the Frankenmuth Credit Union Foundation to improve the Saginaw repeater and extend the NWS microwave network further into the NWS coverage area.

This will bring the network fairly close to Lansing, and will likely be joined by number of EOCs in District 3, making the potential to extend the network into the SEOC realistic. This microwave network is a class B (16-bit) subnet physically separate from the Internet.

6.2. Civil Air Patrol

- CAP held a joint HF exercise with the Air Force

6.3. MARS

- MARS held an exercise to test interoperability between MARS and amateur radio stations

6.4. SATERN

- SATERN began holding a weekly HF net