

# October 11, 2014 Texas Combined ARES/MARS/RACES Exercise

## Version 1.0 September 5, 2014

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**I. Schedule:** October 11, 2014 8AM to 1PM CDT. Traffic objectives may be started at 6PM October 10 (start of Army MARS Exercise).

**II. Goal:** Exercise ARES readiness of agency installations, ARES Mutual Aid Teams and other ARES stations in partnership with Texas ARMY MARS and RACES organizations. Include as many served agencies and other participants as possible in local and wider area events.

**III. Scenario:** The major potential threat to South Texas remains that of a hurricane. The scenario for this year combines the actual events of a major storm such as Hurricane Ike with the effects of a stalled movement of Hurricane Rita.

A category V storm of unusually large size hits the coast just to the east of Port Lavaca. Because of the unusually large storm front, gale force winds are felt along the coast from Brownsville to Port Arthur with most areas experiencing hurricane force winds. Because of the size and strength of the storm, there is significant storm surge damage all along the Gulf coast, with the primary affected areas from Corpus Christi to Galveston Island and Houston.

The storm starts to move inland on a North-Northeast track taking it between Austin and San Antonio. The storm's progress is halted approximately 100 miles inland by a boundary condition coming down from Canada. This area is pounded by hurricane force winds for a period in excess of 24 hours.

As a result, utility powers and trees are substantially impacted. One in three power poles are down resulting in widespread loss of utility power. In addition, cell phone towers have been devastated so the system is heavily compromised but not entirely out of service. Cell coverage remains spotty and intermittent.

The storm itself is huge so, while the major effects are centered in the middle of South Texas, bands of heavy rain and wind continue over most of the Section with local damage and flooding resulting in loss of infrastructure and the use of certain low lying roads.

**IV. Local Participation:** ECs and DECAs are encouraged to develop local content to exercise their specific responses to the scenario. For example:

- a. With electrical power out, local resources for delivering food and water will be stressed. Emphasize working with Red Cross and local officials for food and water distribution. Include getting status information back to the State Operations Center (which may be simulated if not actually manned) and the Section Emergency Coordinator.
- b. Water and wind damage may be extensive and served agencies will have lost their prime communications systems. Trunking systems that rely on normal infrastructure will be affected. Evacuation scenarios would be appropriate as would working with served agencies (or their simulated equivalents) for dispatch, evacuation, and crowd control.
- c. The Message Pickup Station system should be utilized for moving Winlink email into and out of local areas. Practice local distribution and linking of messages into and out of your area. Focus on N5TW as the primary Message Pickup Station for Texas.
- d. Interoperability is still a key task for all Amateur Radio Organizations (MARS, ARES, and RACES). Work with local MARS and RACES organizations to prove interoperable capability among the three Amateur Radio Organizations.

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Where possible, served agencies should be involved in the drill and should certainly be aware of it even if not participating directly. Contact should also be made with local Army MARS members and RACES members to facilitate interoperability among all services.

Contact with local served agencies should be made as soon as possible to see if they will participate. Since some served agencies do not want to drill on weekends, consider doing all or part of your local drill during the week. You may want to do the drill in two parts: one part during the week if your served agencies will participate, and one part on Saturday for maximum participation by your members who work during the week.

**V. Objectives:** The following are the section exercise objectives. DECs and ECs are encouraged to include additional local objectives based on their local situation to train and develop their organizations.

- a. The Texas HF net will be activated according to standard procedures on 7285 (daytime) or 3873 (nighttime)
- b. Local nets should operate according to local plans and procedures
- c. Interoperability with neighboring counties should be tested
- d. Local liaison with the HF net should be established to check in and maintain contact with the state net
- e. Local stations should check into (and out of) the HF net according to operational protocols. Only the designated liaison station(s) need to remain on the HF net after checking in and out.
- f. Individual stations should participate in their local area drills. If digital capability is available, each station should send an ICS-213 (in rich text format) with the following to your EC and to the SEC:
  - i. Operator(s) call sign
  - ii. Affiliation
  - iii. Location
  - iv. Local net frequency/tone if any
  - v. Winlink capabilities – e.g. VHF Packet, RMS Express, HF WINMOR, etc.
  - vi. Station power type (commercial, generator, battery, etc.)
- g. Each communications group is to send an ICS-213 (rich text format) with simulated situational awareness information based on your local drill scenario to their Disaster District Committee if the DDC is participating and can handle the traffic. If the DDC is not operational or not able to forward the digital traffic, send it directly to the State Operations Center (SOC) with a copy to the SEC ([NQ5L@winlink.org](mailto:NQ5L@winlink.org)). To be considered complete, you must receive a reply back from the SOC. (The SOC will be simulated if it is not activated for the drill. Unless otherwise noted before the exercise, use [TEMPSOC@winlink.org](mailto:TEMPSOC@winlink.org) for the state EOC address.
- h. The use of Winlink is the de facto standard for digital traffic within Texas ARES. All groups are encouraged to initiate digital messages to and from individual members. The ICS-213 format may be used if appropriate but plain text may also be used.

- i. The use of Message Pickup Stations for routing messages without an Internet connection is a key functional capability for ARES. Using this capability both within your county and for interaction with other counties, DDCs, and the State is a critical skill that must be developed.
- j. Prior to the drill, additional information on working Winlink addresses will be provided.
- k. Local drills are encouraged to use the appropriate ICS forms in setting up and conducting their drills.
- l. Requests for any outside the district assistance should be made through the appropriate DEC as required by the Section Emergency Plan.

**VI. After Action Reports:** Each EC for participating groups will be expected to submit an after action report. Reports should contain the following information:

1. Name of county participating
2. Number of participants
3. Agencies participating
4. Were you able to submit and ICS-213 to the DDC or SOC?
5. Did you get a reply from the SOC?
6. Were you able to establish HF Exercise net liaison?
7. Summary of local operations
8. What went well?
9. What did not go well?
10. Lessons learned
11. Suggestions for future exercises

**VII. Safety:** Safety will be the prime objective in this exercise. Deploying members should exercise special care in erecting antennas especially in areas with exposure to the public. Exercise caution with generators including proper grounding, fuel storage and fire safety.

**VIII. Notes:** ICS-213 Forms should be edited and saved in a format to minimize size to improve transmission speed. Creating in and editing with Wordpad and saving in RTF (Rich Text Format) results in a file around 4KB versus 50KB for Word. Simple plain text versions of ICS-213s are especially efficient and acceptable. Keeping these forms small is CRITICAL to the success of this exercise!