

# Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service



## RACES

## What Is RACES?

Founded in 1952, the Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES) is a public service provided by a reserve (volunteer) communications group within government agencies in times of extraordinary need. During periods of RACES activation, certified unpaid personnel are called upon to perform many tasks for the government agencies they serve. Although the exact nature of each activation will be different, the common thread is communications.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides planning guidance and technical assistance for establishing a RACES organization at the state and local government level. A comprehensive RACES manual, *Guidance for Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service*, is available on the FEMA Web site <http://www.fema.gov/library/civilpg.shtm>.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is responsible for the regulation of RACES operations. RACES is administrated by a local, county, or state civil defense agency responsible for disaster services. This civil defense agency is typically an emergency services or emergency management organization, sometimes within another agency such as police or fire. RACES is a function of the agency's Auxiliary Communications Service (ACS), sometimes known as DCS (Disaster Communications Service), ECS (Emergency Communications Service), ARPSC (Amateur Radio Public Service Corps), etc. Many ACS units identify themselves solely as RACES organizations, even though their communications functions and activities typically go beyond the restrictions of RACES operations. Other ACS units combine government RACES and non-government ARES (Amateur Radio Emergency Service) activities and identify themselves as ARES/RACES organizations. Yet other ACS units who use amateur radio for emergency government communications identify themselves solely as ARES organizations, whether or not they activate under FCC RACES Rules.

The Amateur Radio Regulations, Part 97, Subpart E, §97.407, were created by the FCC to describe RACES operations in detail. Although no longer issued or renewable, RACES station licenses were issued in the past by the FCC to government agencies for RACES operations. The agencies may continue to conduct RACES operations without these licenses, using primary or club call signs.

ACS, in its RACES and other reserve emergency communications functions, provides a pool of emergency communications personnel that can be called upon in time of need. ACS/RACES groups across the country prepare themselves for the inevitable day when they will be called upon. When a local, county, or state government agency activates its ACS unit, that unit will use its communications resources (RACES, if necessary) to meet whatever need that agency has.

Traditional RACES operations involve emergency message handling on Amateur Radio Service frequencies. These operations typically involve messages between critical locations such as hospitals, emergency services, emergency shelters, and any other locations where communication is needed. These communications are handled in any mode available, with 2 meters FM being the most prevalent. During time of war, when the President exercises his War Emergency Powers, RACES might become the only communications allowed via amateur radio, using specific amateur frequencies set aside for wartime RACES use. ACS provides greater flexibility than RACES for non-wartime emergencies, on any amateur frequency designated in the local, county, or state ACS (or RACES) plan. Activating under the FCC's restrictive RACES Rules is not always necessary when using Amateur Radio Service frequencies for emergency communications. For example, ACS communicators may need to communicate with ARES or other radio amateurs who are not government-certified to operate in a RACES net. ACS personnel also might become involved in non-amateur public-safety or other government communications, Emergency Operations Center (EOC) staffing, and emergency equipment repair.

Whatever need arises, trained ACS personnel are ready and prepared to help, via RACES or other means. ACS/RACES groups develop and maintain their communications ability by training throughout the year with special exercises and public-service events. When that fateful day occurs, ACS/RACES will be there to meet the challenge.

To join ACS or RACES and to be able to participate in RACES and other government emergency communications activities, contact your local, county, or state ACS Officer or RACES Radio Officer or Coordinator.

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