

Black Hills Area ARES Strategy Session Minutes - Hermosa - 27 Feb 05

01. The meeting was called to order by Rausch and Hawley at 12:00 noon at the Volunteer Fire Department in Hermosa, SD. 21 ARES members and other Black Hills area amateurs interested in emergency preparedness were in attendance. All in attendance introduced themselves, and a sign-in sheet was circulated (attachment #1). Handouts were distributed (attachment #2). Burch volunteered to be the Scribe.
02. The goals of the meeting were reviewed:
 - 1) Determine current emergency preparedness level
 - 2) Establish preparedness goals for 2005 and beyond
 - 3) Should we be a hills-wide group, or more localized (counties)?
 - 4) Involvement with / briefing of served agencies
 - 5) Demonstration of capabilities at SET (Oct '05)
03. Each county in the Black Hills reported on the current capabilities of their ARES organizations:

Lawrence Co. (Burch): An EOC is in place with amateur HF and VHF equipment at the Lawrence County dispatch point in Deadwood. The Lead EOC has full EmComm facilities including backup power, bunkrooms, kitchen, etc. Many of the fire department staff are hams. Good working relationship with local government.

Butte Co. (Hawley): There are only a few active hams in Butte County.

Fall River Co. (Anderson & Knapp for Seboldt): There are a large number of amateurs, no formal training yet. Recognized need to license more young people. Nightly weather net on Bear Mtn repeater. Local government is supportive of ham radio: purchased a 3KW generator and a new trailer for use by the Hot Springs club. A portable repeater is being built. Hot Springs ARC has full-capability clubhouse useable as a control location.

Pennington Co. (Palmer): New EC (Palmer with assistants Brand & Rausch) getting organized. Approximately 25 interested individuals identified. A trailer with tower is available. No generator available yet, but BHARC has plans to get one operational this year **(AI-06)**. J-pole antennas being readied for deployment. Possible working relationship with Rapid City Red Cross. BHARC club house is candidate for used as a control location for ARES and EmComm activities. We should investigate the cost of a trailer or camper that can be set up and ready to go **(AI-08)**. In-place agreement with Rapid City National Weather Service for communications and spotter services, permanent VHF station located at the Weather Service Office. A meeting is scheduled with the Pennington Co. Emergency Manager (Park Owens) on 10 March, Palmer / Brand / Rausch to attend.

Meade Co. (McPherson): Four identified amateurs interested in ARES / EmComm. VHF station with packet located in county EOC. Meade Co. may join with other groups due to limited amateur population. It was also noted that more use should be made of repeaters and the state link **(AI-07)**.

State EC (Hawley): County ECs need to report activities to SEC so that amateur radio gets the credit and recognition that it deserves. Reports are rolled up and forwarded to SD SM and on to ARRL. The same issue is present with the Public Service Activity Reports (PSARs). Since the events of 9/11 there has been a reawakened interest in communications facilities that are not tied to the usual communication infrastructure, and ham radio can step up to the challenge and opportunity and should go forward to seek funding and other assistance.
04. The group did some brainstorming to identify the potential emergency situations we may have to deal with:

Forest Fires: With the extreme drought conditions in the Black Hills area, we are almost certainly going to have fires this summer.

Terrorists: Bombings, nuclear, biological, dam sabotage, etc were discussed as possible scenarios.

Floods: Several of the members present helped out in the 1972 flood. 2 meter traffic was passed to the EOCs and to members' homes who had emergency power. Messages were passed via HF to areas outside of SD (Chicago, KC, etc for medical supplies, pumps, etc).

Weather: We have a good relationship with the NWS, and regularly activate the Skywarn 2 meter net from the NWS office in Rapid City during stormy weather. This is working well.

Accidents: Plane crash, interstate highway pile-ups, hazardous material spills are possibilities.

Unusual Event: McPherson reported on a forum he attended at Dayton last year regarding ham radio support of the space shuttle break-up. Hams were ready with GPS equipment and wilderness skills to find debris. That local group in Texas was prepared and performed a valuable service.

Stream Monitors: Several members helped to locate errant stream monitors (many located throughout the Hills). The stream monitor would periodically transmit an out-of-band signal which was picked up by satellite (thought to be and ELT). Direction finding capability located the defective monitor within a couple of days.

05. The following lessons-learned were offered by those who have participated in past actual or simulated emergencies:
- Lots and lots of health & welfare traffic will be passed ("We're OK"). **(AI-01)**
 - Logistical traffic may be passed.
 - Page & text messages may be necessary. Packet or PSK are possibilities.
 - Incident Commanders need to know of our capabilities **(AI-03)**
 - Amateurs must be familiar with the ICS structure **(AI-04)**
 - Scanner users listen to all traffic for many purposes, sensitize members to be careful what they say. **(AI-05)**
06. The relevance of amateur radio to our served agencies was discussed. The group thought that our greatest opportunity to serve will be immediately after the event out to three days or so. At that time, official agencies would probably be back in operation and have their own communicators available. Most served agencies have satcom capabilities so that should be operable in fairly short order after an event.
07. The following "served agencies" were identified as possibilities:
- Weather Service (storm spotting / Skywarn)
 - Emergency Management - state, federal, local (logistics)
 - Police (logistics)
 - Fire (logistics)
 - Civil Air Patrol (plane crash, missing persons)
 - Search & Rescue (missing persons, accidents, plane crash)
 - Red Cross (logistics)
 - Forest Service (fires, missing persons, animal tracking)
 - Salvation Army (logistics)
 - Hospitals (incoming injured & extent of injuries)
 - Radio stations (information)
 - FCC (malfunctioning transmitters / willful interference direction finding)
 - Power companies (noise direction finding)
08. The use of EOCs and clubhouse facilities as communication centers was discussed. Excellent clubhouse facilities exist in Hot Springs, Rapid City, and Lead. Four area residents (Brand, Streich, Rohrer, Cash) have ham-outfitted motor homes or campers. **(AI-10), (AI-11)**. Several items were mentioned relating to preparation of the clubhouses:
- Check lists for walk-ins
 - Monthly equipment & generator checks on club meeting night
 - ID cards
 - Demonstration, certification of capabilities, drills, practice (leading to reliable operation)
 - Inventory of equipment, assess its usability
 - Training of users of radio equipment, generators, repeater HW

- g) items listed in AREC course material
09. The status of the following county EOCs was provided **(AI-09)**:
- a) Shannon: none, operations managed out of Fall River Co.
 - b) Butte: none
 - c) Fall River: Dispatch center out of Sheriff's office
 - d) Custer: Basement of courthouse, near Civil Defense center
 - e) Meade: Courthouse, has packet & VHF equipment. Sturgis police or FEMA may have a trailer.
 - f) Pennington: Basement of old courthouse, has packet, VHF, and coax to roof for HF
 - g) Lawrence: Lead City Hall, very complete comm, wx monitoring. There is a good write up in the handouts by Burch / Hawley regarding the capabilities of the Lead City Hall facilities. County courthouse in Deadwood - HF equipment.
 - h) Can we get into the EOCs anytime or is an escort needed? Is an ID needed?
10. A detailed discussion was held on the subject of digital modes, and the need for standardizing on one mode. Over the years, ECs have stressed the need for packet at the EOCs and perhaps at clubhouses and members' home. The use of and interest in packet has declines markedly over the years. Many members have equipment but don't know how to use it. Several other modes were considered: PSK31, RTTY, fax. It was decided to make a concerted effort to get reliable packet operation in place for emergency usage. A committee was formed to get this organized. The committee shall be named "The Area Wide Packet Working and Standards Committee". The following members either volunteered to be on the committee or were identified as excellent choices to be on the committee: McPherson (chair), Cash, Douvier, Naber, Jeffries (Dave), with Hawley to be available as a resource person. **(AI-02)**. The committee shall be responsible for:
- a) Providing training for interested users
 - b) Establishing a standard, or at least preferred, equipment configuration
 - c) Creating a cabling diagram
 - d) Recommending a plan to keep packet equipment checked out and operational at the EOCs and clubhouses
 - e) Recommending solutions to EMI / EMC issues
 - f) Evaluating TNC-less sound card systems
 - g) Identifying experts
 - h) Specifying frequencies that will be used for ARES drills and deployments
 - i) Recommending a packet system for mobile use, and getting 1 system operational
 - j) Recommending a packet system for pedestrian use, and getting 1 system operational
- The above items shall be completed by 31 August 05. The committee members should call on the club presidents (or anyone else) to assist with implementing the items listed above.
11. Hawley reviewed the necessity of getting all responders trained and certified to at least the ARRL AREC Level I. The steps necessary to use the on-line training were reviewed (see ARRL website for details). Rausch presented a list of ARRL training classes (course descriptions & times in the handout, also available on ARRL website). All three levels should be completed as a stretch goal. An ID card will be issued to all responders - initially the card will be issued only to those getting Level I certified. Douvier volunteered to make the ID cards. Rausch will provide Douvier the data to be included on the ID cards **(AI-13)**. Served agencies need to be briefed on the ID card - the card needs to be acceptable to our served agencies. Certification level should be either on the card or implied by the possession of the card.

12. Rausch presented the requirements to become an Official Emergency Station, an ARRL field organization position (details in handout and on the ARRL website). All who are interested are encouraged to apply for this appointment. Other training material was discussed:
 - a) AREC Levels I, II, and III
 - b) ICS 100
 - c) FEMA on-line self-paced courses
 - d) Red Cross may also have some courses available
 - e) CPR and basic first aid
 - f) ICS-213 and ARRL radiogram message formats
13. Rausch presented the summer event schedule (in handout and on BHARC website). Palmer is the maintainer of the schedule, and is the interface with the community service groups we are supporting. Also discussed was the opportunity to add another event to the schedule (actually two events sponsored by the Multiple Sclerosis organization. The group agreed to support this new event if it doesn't conflict with previously scheduled events. Palmer will contact the MS group to determine the details, and add it to the event list if possible **(AI-14)**. These events provide excellent opportunities to keep portable gear operational, practice net procedures, and enjoy amateur radio while providing a community service. All ARES members are encouraged to participate in these events, and club officers are encouraged to solicit participation from all club members.
14. Rausch reviewed the ARES application form, as modified by Hawley. The form in the handout has been recently modified to include "laptops". Rausch to put the latest form in the handout package to be included with the official minutes, and to send it to Palmer ASAP **(AI-15)**. Palmer is collecting the forms for Pennington County ARES members.
15. Rausch presented the plans that BHARC is using for 2005 (in handout package). An emergency preparedness track and a technical growth track will be focused on each year. For 2005, BHARC has the following goals:
 - Emergency Preparedness Goals**
 - a) continue the Western SD Emergency net
 - b) schedule DF exercises **(AI-16)**, **(AI-17)**
 - c) get one generator working for use at the clubhouse
 - d) replace the backup batteries on the 94 repeater
 - e) get an NVIS antenna operational for 75 meters
 - f) organize the clubhouse as a communications center
 - g) begin / continue discussions with served agencies
 - h) demonstrate capabilities to served agencies at SET
 - Technical Growth Goals**
 - a) QRP transceiver for PSK31, with class and labs
16. It was proposed that a regular net be set up on the state link, perhaps on Saturday mornings, to get members familiar with this asset, and to keep advised of its operational status **(AI-07)**.
17. Rausch proposed a comprehensive SET exercise (details in handout). The purpose of the exercise is to have a target date for completing our plans. McPherson stated that the goal should be asset response, not delivering babies in fire trucks (referring to the proposed Butte County scenario). Rausch agreed, and was open to other suggestions. The SET exercise will be planned as presented. The group voted unanimously to prepare for and participate in the SET exercise. Hawley and Rausch to organize the event **(AI-12)**. The ARRL SET report form was reviewed, with the purpose of getting ideas of what has been done in the past. There were many good ideas that pertain to our summer public service events also. Other questions raised to be addressed in the plan:
 - a) insurance coverage
 - b) use of the 75 meter NVIS antenna to pass traffic to Pierre
 - c) use of the state link to pass traffic to Sioux Falls (to Section Mgr. Beebe)
 - d) could we use a portable repeater for one of the scenarios

- e) traffic should be passed using both the ARRL radiogram and ICS message formats.
18. Palmer stated the need for practice traffic / message handling **(AI-18)**.
 19. Attempts should be made to get press releases and media coverage of the SET **(AI-12)**.
 20. Rausch presented information about the SD hamfest which will be in Sioux Falls on 16 April 05.
 21. McPherson reviewed the operation of the Western SD Emergency Net which meets for three weeks of the year (in Feb after the auction, in June prior to Field Day, and in October during SET). The purpose is to familiarize members with net procedures and traffic handling. To date, the net has been held on the 94 and 76 repeaters, but perhaps there might be an HF session this year. The NVIS antenna project might be used here. See January QST for a related article. Palmer volunteered to see if this net might be expanded in scope to be a more regularly scheduled event **(AI-19)**.
 22. McPherson suggested that a Technical Standard Subcommittee be established to document such topics as standardization of the Anderson Power Pole 12 volt connector **(AI-20)**.
 23. The group desired to meet again, and perhaps quarterly, and act as an umbrella organization for Black Hills EmComm activities. Rausch volunteered to organize another session after the plans for the SET are developed, in about the May timeframe **(AI-21)**.
 24. What is RACES, and is it relevant to what we are doing **(AI-22)**.