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THE AUXILLIARY COMMUNICATION SYSTEM (ACS) WILL REPLACE THE RACES PROGRAM

Framingham, MA - Mike Neilsen, W1MPN, Acting State RACES Officer (SRO) announced an agreement with the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) to realign the mission and responsibilities of the present RACES program at the MEMA Headquarters and three regional offices, as well as in the cities and towns where there is an established RACES program. The new organization, the Auxiliary Communications System (ACS), will replace RACES as the organization dedicated to assisting MEMA using a broader cadre of volunteers effective April 1, 2012.

Over the last fifty years, Amateur Radio (AR) operators provided much needed relief to communities stranded by communication failures during natural and man-made disasters. "That is not the case anymore. The RACES mission has become outmoded and progressively unresponsive to MEMA's needs", Mike said during his briefing of interested AR operators last Saturday in Sutton, MA. "MEMA has asked us to change our mission because more robust state radio systems are now available to public safety first responders". Other realities such as complex training requirements and strict post 9-11 security requirements have dramatically removed the AR operator from the response matrix. W1MPN further stated, "We all have new jobs now."

Highlights of the new program include:

There are no changes planned for the Plymouth, Seabrook, and the Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Plant Evacuation Plans. RACES Operators will continue to be retained in the cities and towns that support that program. These same RACES operators would also likely be

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involved with ACS at the local city and town level in other disaster related scenarios at the discretion of it's EMA Director. MEMA has established WEBEOC as their primary communication system, with state radio backup. This redundant radio system greatly reduces the likelihood of needing the services of AR frequencies and the RACES volunteers for a backup ("failover") radio system. Current local city and town RACES volunteers are encouraged to become involved in ACS, which uses WEBEOC and the backup VHF radio system. In the unlikely event that those systems fail, AR VHF/UHF frequencies would then be utilized including AR HF frequencies since a state HF system does not exist.

MEMA will become one of the Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES) served agencies (clients), where disaster intelligence data gathering support will be provided on an as needed basis pursuant to future MOU's through a new program to be run similar to the SKYWARN program. ARES uses a similar approach with organizations such as the American Red Cross. MEMA has also asked the current RACES Regional Officers and ARES leadership to help develop the new program criteria and training for delivering damage reports from the local cities and towns to MEMA.

MEMA will build a team of ACS volunteers who will specialize in operating the MEMA backup radio systems, whether or not they possess an amateur radio license. Those operating these radios will be called Radio Operators (RADO's), and will need to meet security and professional standards that are yet to be developed. ACS volunteers will also specialize in multi-task roles that will help the anticipated more centralized MEMA organization of the future. Mike Neilsen, W1MPN, as the acting State RACES Officer, is slated to become the AR Coordinator for the new State MEMA ACS volunteer program. Regional RACES Officers will transition consistent with the development of the regional ACS program.

Cities and Towns will be asked to adopt as much of the ACS tasking in order to transmit their information to the regional and state authorities. The monthly RACES Nets are slated to become the monthly ACS Nets in the new program on the first Monday of every month (second Monday if it is a legal holiday), as coordinated by regional and state ACS representatives.

The planned centralization of MEMA operations at the SEOC may eliminate or materially change the role of the present RACES Regional Officer. To help ensure communication links with local authorities will not be lost, ARES has established regional command centers in the EMA in the town Bridgewater EOC, at the Clay Center in Brookline, at the Acushnet EOC, and one is being developed on the North Shore. Efforts are now underway to establish one each in the Worcester and Springfield areas.

cc: EMA and WMA ARES