

Mecklenburg County ARES®

What is ARES?

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The Mecklenburg County (ARES) is comprised of FCC licensed Amateur Radio Operators who have voluntarily registered their capabilities and equipment for public service communications. The primary responsibility of the Mecklenburg ARES is to furnish emergency communications in the event of disaster or other event, when regular communications fail or become inadequate for served agencies to perform their duties.

That mission statement sure is a mouthful. I'm here tonight to put that into a little bit simpler terms. Tonight I'll tell you who ARES is, the general capabilities that we have and what we need to do to accomplish our tasks. I feel that it is very important that the Amateur radio community understand what we are all about.

So, let's ask the first question. Who is ARES? Is ARES some mysterious organization that appears out of nowhere during emergencies? Nooo! To be blunt – ARES is YOU! You, the folks that volunteer your time to operate radios during an emergency to help our community deal with and recover from natural or manmade disasters. For most of us, one of the prevailing reasons for getting an Amateur Radio license is to be able to help our community. Once we get that license, we have a capability for communicating that the general public just does not have. Ham Radio Operators are, without a doubt, the most valuable asset that ARES has. All the radio equipment in the world comes to naught without operators to make them work. So you are ARES!

Next question. What equipment and capabilities do we have?

Above and beyond the equipment that individual ARES members bring to the table during emergencies, we also have Go Boxes, permanent fix stations and a communication trailer assembled by the fine clubs in our county. All of this equipment is designated for use by ARES during emergencies. Both clubs, W4BFB and W4CQ have fully functional club stations with HF and VHF/UHF radios. Both clubs stations have HF yagis and wire antennas, they also vertical antennas for VHF/UHF use. This gives these stations much more capable than many of our home stations. The W4BFB club station is located at the Red Cross headquarters on Park Road and the W4CQ club station is located at the Salvation Army headquarters on Archdale Drive.

Along with this fixed station capability, W4BFB has assembled 3 VHF/UHF Go Boxes for ARES use. The go boxes have Kenwood V71A dual band radios, a TNC (for packet radio), a notebook computer, a power supply and a dual band mobile antenna. All of this equipment including manuals, message forms, power/patch cables, power strips, extension cords, etc. is housed inside a weather resistant, hard side, padded pelican case.

To expand our field capability even more, W4BFB has also assembled an Emergency Communications trailer, which should be on display at the Charlotte Hamfest early next month. This new trailer replaces the older trailer that many of you may have seen at W4BFB Field Day operations. Used in conjunction with their portable generators, portable towers, Yagis and wire antennas this gives us a broad capability for expanding emergency communications in our area.

What do we need to do to accomplish our goals? We need to make sure that our operators have experience using the equipment that has been made available to us by the fine clubs in our area. The easiest way to do this is to volunteer for club activities such as Field Day, public service and other events. Both clubs have field day operations where you can get hands on experience operating their equipment. Public service events such as bike and foot races will give you experience in participating in a communications net under field conditions.

W4CQ also has an upcoming event, the North Carolina QSO Party Feb 23rd....10 AM to 8 PM, where volunteers get a chance to operate their club equipment. They will be operating from the Salvation Army headquarters on Archdale Drive.

In addition to those events I will be working with both clubs to get access and training using their club station equipment. W4CQ already has implemented this; they have meetings every Thursday at 7:30 PM at the Salvation Army and bring interested Amateurs into the club station for training each 3rd and 4th Thursday of the month.

Go Box specific training has yet to be scheduled and it will probably be held at the Red Cross headquarters. Within the next 2 weeks Go Box equipment manuals and some general instructions about their use will be added to the Mecklenburg ARES website in the links section. If you are interested in learning how to operate the Go Boxes please make yourself familiar with the radios and equipment by reading these documents. Operators interested in hands on training with the Go Boxes please email me at KE4VVF@gmail.com and I will notify you about the training schedule when it is finalized.

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