

History of ARES and NTS

ASTEN has been focused for some time on ARES and the National Traffic System. I thought it might be good food for thought to cover some of the history of ARES and the NTS. I know some of our new folks will benefit from knowing the history and for all those that already know it, it is pleasant to our ears to know the history is still being taught and shared with those that are coming online today.

The history of the Amateur Radio Emergency Service begins in 1935 with a note in the Sept. 1935 issue of QST magazine which is published by the ARRL asking hams interested in signing up for emergency communications to write to League HQ in Newington CT. Initial instructions were for members to contact their local civic officials and offer their services. The goal was to have at least one ARRL Emergency Corps member in each community. The first local emergency coordinators were appointed in 1937.

Following WWII the position of Section Emergency Coordinator was established as an official appointment to be made by the Section Communications Manager, (now SM). In 1951 the AEC became the Amateur Radio Emergency Corps. In 1963 the AREC was made the emergency division of the Amateur Radio Public Service Corps. In 1978 the AREC was changed to ARES.

The American Radio Relay League (ARRL) sponsored the Amateur Radio Public Service Corps (ARPSC), as a voluntary organization of licensed amateur radio operators. It was in answer to a Federal Communications Commission mandate in Part 97 under Basics and Purpose, to enhance, "the value of the amateur service as a voluntary non commercial communications service, particularly with respect to providing emergency communications."

The Communications Department of the ARRL in Newington, CT guides today all activities of ARES and the NTS. In 1949 the ARRL organized the National Traffic System, which is the largest amateur message relay system in the world and is, used by amateur radio operators as a 365-day a year public service.

The NTS is a system of traffic or message handling nets, which meet daily across the US. In this system a message can be introduced at any point within the system and be delivered at any other point intact. This system covers all of the US, its territories and possessions and all of Canada. This takes quite a bit of organization and training to accomplish. To assure that a message is not lost or changed in transit the NTS has over the years established a format for message transmission within the NTS. The ARRL radiogram serves this purpose.

ARES and the NTS continue to play an all important role in Emergency communications. ARES and the NTS will change in the future, as it always has in the past. A look at the past teaches us that things have always changed over time. The important thing to remember is that as changes come our way in the future, that we don't forget to teach the past to those who come online.