

# “SERVICE TO THE PUBLIC”

# FCC RULES

## [Part 97.1(a)]

Have you ever noticed what the often quoted portion from the FCC’s “Basis and Purpose” [Part 97.1(a)] of the amateur service does not say? Nowhere does it mention served agencies or service to the government, Part 97.407 addresses that. While we often provide emergency communications indirectly, through a private or government agency; that is not the only way we can provide service to the public. Suppose an incident occurs in your area and your team is well-trained, ready and wants to assist. There is a widespread power outage and all commercial landline services are out. But all private and government agency emergency communications systems are still functioning. Your team leader has been politely told by local officials “you won’t be needed” and that “there is no need for amateur radio emergency communications. Is there still a useful role for your team? You can bet your battery charger there is!

Suppose you are on your way home after being told you won't be needed. It is now after dark, and as you drive by a location you observe a group of people congregating. It could be a city park or at a community center, in a church hall, or even a parking lot. You stop to investigate. They are evacuees and are somewhat dazed and are milling around. A man walks over to your car and sees the EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS placard you have on the windshield. He tells you that the cell phone cells are all overloaded and asks if you can get a message to his family 100 miles away.

You have recently received training in message traffic handling. You reply,

“I’ll sure give it a try!” You contact your local net control operator and advise that you may have traffic for Jonesboro, a town about 100 miles away. While talking you notice that a line has begun to form by your car. You tell the net control operator that you need some help, and are requesting the Ares Emergency Coordinator to send at least one more operator. Within a few minutes another operator arrives and parks his mobile unit nearby.

The NCS then directs you to move to a pre-designated local VHF simplex traffic frequency where your team’s VHF/HF relay is standing by to accept message traffic. Solid contact is easily established via simplex with the relay station.

You pick up your clip board and pen and using your head lamp, you ask the stranger to tell you the name, address, and phone number of the intended recipient. Then you ask what he wants to tell them. You format the message and read it back to him. He replies with, “That is correct”.

You ask him his name and where he might be if there is a return message. You look up and you now see 30 to 40 people, all wanting to send a message! You take a deep breath and notice that another team member is just parking their truck/camper/VHF/HF mobile. Soon two more skilled operators arrive. A local business sees what is going on and provides a table and some folding chairs. Two operators begin to serve as counter persons. Since rain is still in the forecast, you request net control to contact your Ares group's logistics coordinator and to send a sunshade-dining fly.

The next day, an amateur radio club in the next county, sends its recently refurbished communications trailer. The Red Cross opens a shelter in a recreation hall at a nearby church.

Your portable field station remains on the air for six days and handles hundreds of messages but, not just for “the public”. Over the course of the event, the served agencies realize that they do need amateur radio communications after all, and the station handles several hundred agency messages.

Oh yes, later you learn that one of the messages your station handled was from a relative of your County Judge. A month later, you and your team's leader are invited to a Regional Disaster Preparedness Committee, to give a presentation on the value of amateur radio during emergencies!

Aren’t you glad that you didn’t “turn tail” and go home when you were told

you weren't needed that first night? This is "service to the public" as it was meant to be!

**The following are a few GUIDELINES for "self-activated" Ares field communications stations:**

1. Always set up in a safe location outside the perimeter of an incident.
2. Do not violate any laws.
3. Don't enter any hazardous areas or anywhere where you do not have permission to go.
4. If you set up on private property get the permission of the owner if at all possible.
5. Appropriate signage, flyers, and word of mouth, will probably bring plenty of "customers".
6. Your local Red Cross, Salvation Army, or other community unit may be interested in setting up a canteen near your station.
7. If anyone asks why you are there, politely explain that you are there as a public service booth to provide communications for anyone that needs it. This is no different that a public service/demonstration booth at the county fair or any other public event.
8. The one exception to all this is of course that RACES units may only be activated by an authorized Government official.
9. Never forget: As Americans we do not need a "permission slip" before we can provide a valuable service to the public.