



**Lake County  
Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES) /  
Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES)**

Amateur radio operators serve a crucial role in providing essential communications when disasters strike and traditional communications fail. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Administrator, Craig Fugate, in 2011, described amateur radio operators as “oftentimes our last line of defense,” and recommended including them in emergency communications plans.

Amateur radio volunteers are licensed by the FCC, and use their own time and resources to get the word out in the critical hours of a disaster. There are two groups of volunteer radio operators that assist during emergencies: Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES) and Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES). Both groups are licensed and trained volunteers, and Lake County RACES/ARES radio operators participate in both organizations.

RACES members are certified and administered by local Emergency Management and supported by FEMA. As defined in Federal Communications Commission (FCC) rules, RACES provides radio communications for civil preparedness and emergency purposes only, including natural disasters. RACES members are also the only Amateur Radio operators authorized to transmit should the President of the United States invoke the *War Powers Act* during a federal emergency.

In Lake County, RACES was activated during the Pagami Creek wildfire of 2011, and the fiber-optic failures of 2010 and 2012. When activated, only civil-preparedness communications can be transmitted among RACES stations. These might include transmitting voice on public safety 800Mhz (ARMER) systems, but also voice and data through radio transmission without the aid of electricity, cell service or internet. Drills are also permitted for one hour a week, or up to 72 hours twice per year with the approval of the chief emergency planning officer.

Such restrictions do not apply when stations are operating in an ARES capacity. ARES members provide emergency communications often without an emergency declaration, and work with non-government organizations such as hospitals and the American Red Cross.

Although RACES and ARES are separate entities, dual memberships and cooperative efforts provide the greatest flexibility. Using the same operators and frequencies, volunteers enrolled in both ARES and RACES can switch roles to meet circumstances. For example, during a non-declared emergency, ARES can operate, but when an emergency or disaster is officially declared, the operators can switch to RACES with no change in personnel or frequencies.

Both groups provide Lake County with Auxiliary Communications (AUXCOMM) not only for emergencies, but also during planned events, tests and exercises with multiple partners. Amateur radio operators are, as Director Fugate stated, “the ultimate backup.”