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Pinellas ACS Activation

1.1 OVERVIEW.

Good evening everyone.

Tonight, we are going to talk about ACS/ARES® Activation and Deactivation within Pinellas County. After the presentation on Activation, I'll pause for questions before talking about deactivation.

This presentation will try to answer the following questions.

- a. Who has the authority to Activate ACS/ARES®?
- b. What are the events that could cause ACS/ARES® to Activate?
- c. What does Activation mean?
- d. How will you be notified about an activation event?
- e. What should you do when you're notified that ACS/ARES® has been activated?
- f. How will you be notified when we are authorized to deactivate?
- g. What should you do when you're notified that ACS/ARES® has been Deactivated?

1.2 ACTIVATION OF ACS/ARES® WITHIN PINELLAS COUNTY.

So, let's start by talking about who's authorized to activate ACS/ARES. The Radio Officer, Clayton, is responsible for the activation of ACS/ARES® within Pinellas County. This will likely occur when he/she is notified by a served agency that they have a need for ACS communicators.

1.3 EVENTS THAT COULD CAUSE ACTIVATION.

There are many reasons we could be activated.

- a. A Loss of internal or external communications, (phone or radio), in any facility that contributes to the public safety or welfare, (e.g., phone cable cuts, hospital Private Branch Exchange (PBX) outages, etc.).
- b. Backup communications due to the overloading of the communications in any facility that contributes to the public safety or welfare.
- c. Communications for a served agency to augment their existing facilities or to provide interfaces to other agencies during emergencies or special events.
 - (1) Very Important Person (VIP) visits
 - (2) Search and Rescue operations
 - (3) Weather events (e.g., Severe thunderstorms, tornados, flash floods, tropical storms, and hurricanes)
 - (4) Industrial accidents, hazardous material spills, major fires (e.g., Urban or rural wildfires)
 - (5) Widespread power outages
 - (6) Cyber-attacks and acts of terror (e.g., Christmas day Bombing at the Nashville AT&T switch facility that crippled telephone and internet services across the region).
 - (7) Acts of War
- d. Communications for non-emergency events that support public safety. (e.g., parades, bicycle races, runs, walk-a-thons, etc.).
- e. And finally, relief or support for ARES®, ACS, or RACES organizations outside of Pinellas County.

1.4 ACTIVATION LEVELS.

What does activation mean? We normally think of activation as the activity associated with deploying to specific locations to support communications; however, like anything else we do, activation is really a multistep process that can be divided into several phases.

When time permits, ACS will walk through each phase one at a time. First, a decision is made that activation is possible, ACS leadership begins planning for a full activation, the membership begins preparing for deployment, and finally, if required, we grab our gear and head to our deployment locations.

To better organize these activities, four activation levels have been defined.

- a. Activation Level 4 (NORMAL): Normal operations.
- b. Activation Level 3 (ALERT): ACS leadership have been notified by one or more served agencies that ACS Communicators may be needed in the near future. However, no specific time frame for activation has been provided.
- c. Activation Level 2 (STANDBY): For Level 2, there is a high probability that ACS/ARES® will be activated. This level of activation will be established when ACS/ARES® is notified that the need for assistance is **imminent**.
- d. Activation Level 1 (ACTIVATE): This level of activation will occur when ACS/ARES® officials are notified by one or more served agencies that the need for assistance is **immediate**.

Let's walk through an example of a potential activation.

During hurricane season, the time between initial formation of a tropical depression and the potential landfall of a tropical storm or hurricane will normally provide us with several days or even a week of advanced notice that a local activation will occur. For this scenario, activation will progress orderly from Level 4 upwards through Level 3 (**ALERT**), Level 2 (**STANDBY**), and Level 1 (**FULL ACTIVATION**) as the storm track and landfall location solidifies. It's also possible that ACS could fall back from a Level 2 to a level 4 if the storm track changes.

In this scenario, we could see the problem coming and had time to prepare; however, this is will not always be the case. Severe thunderstorms, tornados, flash floods, industrial accidents, widespread power outages, cyber-attacks, and acts of terror can occur with little, or no warning and ACS may need to transition from Normal operation, level 4, to Full Activation, level 1, immediately.

So next, lets talk about what occurs during each activation level.

1.4.1 Activation Level 4 (NORMAL).

Normal amateur radio operations. No specific action required. Normal weekly nets and training activities take place.

1.4.2 Activation Level 3 (ALERT Phase).

ACS leadership has been notified by one or more served agencies that ACS Communicators may be needed soon. As I mentioned previously, we have not been provided with a specific time frame for the activation. We only know that activation is possible.

So, what happens next? To a large extent, that depends on whether you hold a staff position within ACS or are part of the general membership. The Radio Officer, Net Manager, each Net Control Station, and Logistics Officer have specific tasks they need to perform.

So, let's go through and see what Activation Level three looks like, starting with the Radio Officer.

1.4.2.1 Radio Officer.

As I stated previously, the radio officer is the individual who has the authority to activate Pinellas ACS. He is also responsible for notifying the ACS membership that activation level 3 has been set. Three methods have been established to support notification.

- a. Issue an ALERT PINELLAS notification to all ACS members (This is currently a work in progress and Clayton will notify everyone when it is fully up and running).
- b. Send an email to all ACS members.
- c. Text and/or call critical ACS members. Critical members will notify the entire team using a calling tree structure.

This all assumes that the phone system and/or internet is operational. And for level three, this should be the case.

Next is the Net Manager...

1.4.2.2 Net Manager.

The net manager has a big job. Depending on the nature and scope of the potential activation, ACS may need to establish more than one net. In addition to the Tactical-Resource net, we may also need to activate the ACS Shelter net and/or the VHF Traffic net (Health and Welfare

messages...). The Net Manager will also have to take into account the potential duration of the activation. The activation period could last only a few hours or span several days. If the potential activation period is lengthy, it will require a significant number of Net Control and Alternate Net Control Stations. With this in mind, the Net Manager will need to perform several tasks.

- a. Create an NCS operational schedule for the ACS/ARES® Tactical-Resource Net, the ACS/ARES® Shelter Net, and the VHF Traffic net. Distribute the NCS operational schedule to all assigned stations and confirm each station can support the plan. Update the plan as required.
- b. Call the assigned NCS and request that the ACS/ARES® Tactical-Resource net be activated.
- c. Create an event specific ICS 205, Incident Radio Communications Plan. The ICS 205 documents all the frequencies and modes that will be used during the potential full activation.
 - (1) Post a copy of the event specific ICS 205 on the Pinellas ACS Web site.
 - (2) Email a copy of the event specific ICS 205 to the Pinellas ACS membership.

1.4.2.3 Net Control Stations.

Once notified by the net manager, the assigned NCS will establish the ACS/ARES® Tactical-Resource net using the W4ACS repeater system. Which is the primary repeater used to support the tactical-resource net.

For level 3, the Tactical-Resource net is considered an informal watch net. The NCS will not request check-ins. Any station may call any other station without the permission of the NCS.

The purpose of the net is to notify everyone that Pinellas ACS is now operating under Activation level 3 and to periodically update the membership on the status of the activation event.

Net Control Scripts and procedures are documented in the Communications Plan.

1.4.2.4 Logistics Officer.

For level 3 there is no tasking for the logistics officer. So, we'll move on to the general membership.

1.4.2.5 General Membership.

So, what should everyone who is not a member of the ACS leadership team do during activation level 3?

- a. Use telephone, text, or email to notify the RO about your ability to support activation. Family and property come first...
- b. Review the Communications Plan and obtain a copy of the event specific ICS 205.
- c. Inventory and check radio equipment and go-kit. Winlink users should verify that software and forms are up to date.
- d. Charge Handie-Talkie (HT), computer, and emergency batteries.
- e. Test emergency generator and top-off fuel supply.
- f. Top-off fuel for car/truck.
- g. Monitor email for ACS/ARES® activation notifications and ICS 205 updates.
- h. Monitor the ACS/ARES® Tactical-Resource net for updates.
- i. Monitor local news reports.

So, that's activation Level 3...

1.4.3 Activation Level 2 (STANDBY).

For Level 2, there is a high probability that ACS/ARES® will be activated. This level of activation will occur when ACS/ARES® officials are notified by one or more served agencies that the need for assistance is *imminent*.

The tasking for each member of the ACS staff, by and large, is the same for level 2 as it was for level 3. The big difference is the timeline.

1.4.3.1 Radio Officer.

Notify the Pinellas County ACS/ARES® membership that activation level 2 has been established. The notification methods will be the same as used for level 3.

1.4.3.2 Net Manager.

The tasking for the net manager remains unchanged from level 3. The NCS schedule and ICS 205 need to be created/updated and published and he/she will need to notify the appropriate NCS that Level 2 has been set. So that the NCS can take the appropriate steps on the Tactical-Resource net.

1.4.3.3 Logistics Officer.

Proceed to the Pinellas County EOC and prepare emergency equipment for distribution.

1.4.3.4 Net Control Stations.

For the NCS, if the Tactical-Resource net is already operational, he/she will need to transition the net to activation level 2. If the net is not operational, the NCS will need to establish the net.

A level 2 net is a formal net and the NCS will request check-ins. The NCS will also provide periodic updates on the status of the activation. NCS scripts and procedures for level 2 are documented in the communications plan.

1.4.3.4.1 General Membership.

So now for the general membership. In addition to the steps we talked about for level 3 activation, there are several additional items we need to do when level 2 is announced.

- a. The first and most important step is to ***Ensure that family and property are safe.***
- b. Use telephone, text, or email to notify/update the RO about your ability to support activation. If cell and internet service are unavailable, provide activation status via the ACS/ARES® Tactical-Resource net.
- c. Emergency Go-kit should be packed and ready for ***immediate*** deployment. If ACS/ARES® transitions to level 1, members should be ready to deploy (Goal) within approximately 15 minutes.
- d. Review this plan and obtain a copy of the most recent event specific ICS 205.
- e. ***Do-Not Self-Deploy. Wait until you receive deployment instructions from the RO, his designee, or the NCS.***
- f. Check-in to the ACS/ARES® Tactical-Resource net and, regardless of whether or not you notified the RO, provide your activation status to the NCS.

Now last but not least is Activation Level 1.

1.4.4 Activation Level 1 (ACTIVATE).

This level of activation will occur when ACS/ARES® leadership is notified by one or more served agencies that they have an *immediate* need for assistance.

The tasking for each member of the ACS staff, by and large, is the same for level 1 as it was for level 2. However, our timeline for planning has been largely eliminated.

1.4.4.1 Radio Officer.

Notify the Pinellas County ACS/ARES® membership that activation level 1 has been established. Depending on the status of phone and internet services, leadership will attempt to use the same notification methods as were used for level 3 and level 2. If phone and internet are not available, the primary method of notification will be via the Tactical-Resource net on the W4ACS repeater system.

1.4.4.2 Net Manager.

The tasking for the net manager remains largely unchanged from level 2. The NCS schedule and ICS 205 need to be created/updated and published (if possible). The Net Manager will need to notify the NCS for the Tactical-Resource net that Level 1 has been set. If evacuation shelters are currently open or scheduled to be open the Net Manager will also need to notify the NCS for the Shelter net.

1.4.4.3 Logistics Officer.

If the Logistics officer is not already at the EOC, he/she will need to proceed to the Pinellas County EOC and prepare emergency equipment for distribution.

Distribute equipment to ACS/ARES® users, as required, to support assignments.

1.4.4.4 Net Control Stations.

For the NCS, if the Tactical-Resource net *is* already operational, he/she will need to transition the net to activation level 1. If the net is not operational, the NCS will need to establish the net.

Like Level 2, level 1 net is a formal net and the NCS will request check-ins.

A significant difference between level 2 and level 1 is the need to deploy and track resources (us). As a result, the NCS will also maintain an up-to-date list of each deployed asset. The list should include the deployment location, when the asset was deployed, when the asset arrived at its destination, and the operational status of each deployment site.

And finally, if notified by the net manager the NCS for the ACS/ARES® Shelter Net will establish the ACS/ARES® Shelter Net.

1.4.4.5 General Membership.

In addition to the steps we talked about for level 3 and level 2, there are several additional items we need to do when level 1 is announced. I'll also repeat some of the most important items we have already covered.

- a. ***Ensure that family and property are safe.***
- b. ***Do-Not Self-Deploy. Wait until you receive deployment instructions from the RO, his designee, or the NCS.***
- c. Use telephone, text, or email to notify/update the RO about your ability to support activation. If cell and internet service are unavailable, provide activation status via the ACS/ARES® Tactical-Resource net.
- d. Emergency Go-kit should be packed and ready for ***immediate*** deployment.
- e. Check-in to the ACS/ARES® Tactical-Resource net and provide your activation status to the NCS.
- f. If notified of an assignment by the RO, his/her designee, or the NCS, perform the following actions.
 - (1) If you require additional equipment to support the assignment, contact the logistics officer and then proceed to the EOC to obtain the equipment. Once you have the equipment in hand, proceed to the specified location or staging area. Notify the NCS upon your arrival at the destination.

- (2) If you do not require additional equipment, proceed directly to the specified location or staging area. Notify the NCS upon arrival.

1.4.5 Exercise Activation.

Now I want to throw a minor twist into the mix and that is that is an exercise activation.

As I mentioned last week, Drills, Functional Exercises, Full Scale Exercises, and Simulated Emergency Tests will be used from time to time to support training.

To optimize training, each drill or exercise will use the same activation and deactivation steps that would be used during a real-world emergency. There are only two exceptions to this rule.

- a. All announcements broadcast during the exercise will clearly state that an exercise is taking place.
- b. All tactical and formal message traffic will clearly state that the traffic is in support of an exercise. We don't want anyone who may be monitoring our nets to think that the emergency being discussed is real.

1.5 QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS - ACTIVATION.

Before I discuss Deactivation, I'd like to pause here for a minute and ask if anyone has a question about ACS Activation. If you have a question, please provide me with your call sign, slowly, clearly, and phonetically so I don't make a mistake when I respond. And then ask your question.

This is WA1RYQ.

[PAUSING FOR QUESTIONS]

1.6 DEACTIVATION.

Deactivation will occur when the organization requesting ACS/ARES® support notifies ACS leadership that our assistance is no longer required. If more than one organization has requested support from ACS, full deactivation will not take place until all requesting organizations indicate that support is no longer required.

So, like Activation, the tasks performed during Deactivation, to a large extent, depend on whether you hold a staff position within ACS or are part of the general membership.

Starting with the Radio officer,

1.6.1 Radio Officer.

The RO will notify the membership that ACS is being deactivated. Both ALERT PINELLAS and email will be used to deliver the information. The RO is also responsible for delivering a copy of the Activation Data set (more about this in just a minute.) to the Pinellas County Department of Emergency Management.

1.6.2 Net Manager.

Notify the NCS for each active network that ACS/ARES® is being deactivated.

1.6.3 Logistics Officer.

Proceed to the Pinellas County EOC and prepare to receive the emergency equipment that was issued in support of the activation event.

1.6.4 Net Control Stations.

When notified by the Net Manager that ACS/ARES® is being deactivated, the NCS for each active net will announce to the net that ACS/ARES® is being deactivated and then complete the processing of any remaining message traffic.

After each NCS finishes processing traffic, things diverge a bit. The NCS for the Shelter Net and the VHF traffic nets are free to secure their nets. However, the NCS for the Tactical-Resource net will remain active to assist deployed units through the demobilization period. Once all deployed units have returned from deployment or indicate that they no longer need assistance, the NCS will secure the Tactical Resource net.

1.6.5 General Membership.

When notified by the NCS that ACS/ARES® is being deactivated, members should perform the following steps.

- a. If deployed, notify your served agency partner that you have been directed to deactivate.
- b. Secure station equipment and if deployed pack equipment for transport.
- c. So far, we haven't talked about what happens during an activation event since that's outside the scope of tonight's presentation. However, one of the important things we do during an Activation event is record keeping. So, all your logs and a copy of message traffic need to be secured.
 - (1) Finalize the site activity (ICS 214) and site communications (ICS 309) logs.
 - (2) Secure a copy of all formal messages exchanged during the activation event and a copy of the event's ICS documentation package (e.g., ICS 201, ICS 205, ICS 217A, etc.).

- (3) Deliver station records to the Pinellas ACS Admin Officer.
- d. If you received emergency equipment from the Pinellas County EOC, you will need to inventory the equipment, document any discrepancies, and then return equipment to the logistics officer at the Pinellas County EOC.
- e. And finally, if you were deployed, notify the NCS for the Tactical-Resource net when your station is secured, when you are in route back to base, and if you need any additional assistance. Don't forget, the Tactical-Resource net will not be secured until the NCS is confident that all deployed units no longer need assistance.

Now that's it for the general membership. However, we have one last thing to talk about before deactivation is complete. And that is the Activation Data Set. This is defined as the set of documentation created by ACS during the Activation event and it is the responsibility of the ACS Admin Officer to collect and secure this information. So, lets quickly talk about the Admin Officer.

1.6.6 ACS Admin Officer.

The ACS Admin officer will...

- a. Obtain the station records and NCS logs from each ACS/ARES® unit that took part in the activation event. That includes those individuals that were deployed and those that were active but did not deploy.
- b. Download from the Winlink RMS a copy of all Winlink messages exchanged during the activation event.
- c. Once the Admin officer has all the data, he/she will create a copy of the data set. This copy will be used by the ACS/ARES® leadership to create an after-action report.
- d. The admin officer will then deliver the original data set for the activation event to the RO. Remember, the RO is required to provide a copy to the Pinellas County DEM.

1.7 QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS – DEACTIVATION.

Before we wrap this up, I'd like to pause here for a minute and ask if anyone has a question about ACS Deactivation. If you have a question, please provide me with your call sign, slowly, clearly, and phonetically so I don't make a mistake when I respond. And then ask your question.

This is WA1RYQ.

[PAUSING FOR QUESTIONS]

1.8 CONCLUSION.

Ok then, that completes this week's presentation. Hopefully, I've addressed each of the question I listed at the beginning of the brief. And any that were acted during the presentation.

As a reminder, two new documents have been posted to the Pinellas ACS web site. They are:

- a. The Pinellas County ACS/ARES® Emergency Communications Plan and Standard Operating Procedures document.
- b. The Pinellas ACS/ARES® Winlink Training Plan

Please download these documents, take a look, and provide me with whatever feedback you believe is appropriate. These documents are still marked as DRAFT, so please provide comments and recommendations. Links to each document are embedded in the posts on the home page of the web site.

This presentation will be posted to the ACS Web Site later this evening.

If you are interested in taking part in Winlink digital training, please send me an email.

I can be contacted via email at WA1RYQ@arrl.net. My contact information is also available on the Pinellas ACS Web site and is located within each of the new documents that have been posted.

Now with that, I turn it back to Net Control.

1.9 QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS.

The following table contains a summary of the comments and questions provided by the membership during the presentation.

No.	Call Sign	Comments	Response
1	KC4SXO	Clarification. An important reason for notifying the NCS that you are leaving your house to pick-up equipment and are in route to a deployment location, is to ensure that you are covered by the county's insurance plan. So, if you have a medical emergency during the deployment, you will be covered by the county.	Comm Plan will be updated to address this comment.
2	KJ4RUS	<p>Addition to clarification provided by KC4SXO. When Emergency Management notifies the ACS Radio Officer that they have an immediate need for ACS communicators, the RO will activate ACS at level 1. Each ACS member who is deployed in response to the activation will be covered by worker's compensation for volunteers. The coverage starts when the ACS member responds to a deployment request (sent to him/her via text, phone call, or NCS message) indicating that the member is leaving his/her home and is now in route to a deployment location. The time of this response message is recorded by the NCS and used to start the clock for worker's comp.</p> <p>This is extremely important. Unfortunately, accidents happen and by properly responding to a request for deployment, you can ensure that you are covered.</p>	Comm Plan will be updated to address this comment.

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No.	Call Sign	Comments	Response
3	W4PXE	When someone calls in to report travel, the Tactical Net Control in the radio room of the EOC will made a note stating that the person is in route to a specific location. When the traveler reports that they have arrived, the EOC will close out the associated travel monitor. If the EOC does not hear back from the traveler, the EOC will call them in approximately 30 minutes to find out where they are located or, if necessary, send someone to look for them.	Comm Plan will be updated to address this comment.
4	KA4EBX	Demobilization and closing out an incident. When an individual arrives home from a deployment location, he/she should notify the NCS, or the individual tracking them, that he/she has arrived home safely. This will enable the ACS leadership to ensure that everyone who was deployed has been properly demobilized, accounted for, and safely home.	Comm Plan will be updated to address this comment.