

Ad Hoc Committee on ARES Communications (ARESCOM)
July 2004
Final Progress Report & Recommendations

Introduction -- The ARESCOM committee mission is to develop a comprehensive program to enhance the current ARES emergency communications capability to include rapid and accurate handling of long range (inter-state, national, and international) emergency related message traffic. This committee was appointed by President Haynie as a result of Minute 25 of the July 2003 BOD Meeting.

Background -- there are situations when the Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES) must have the capability to pass message traffic across the nation quickly and accurately, and future expectations of ARES for such a nationwide capability will likely increase, with the ARRL's Citizens Corps partnership with the Department for Homeland Security. This capability is not currently available to ARES.

Winlink 2000, a Worldwide Amateur Radio Digital Radio Email Network, will allow delivery of message traffic anywhere in the World where Internet services are active, or amateur Winlink Participating Network stations (PMBOs) are operating. The delivery of these messages may be accomplished automatically in a matter of minutes using simple SMTP email formatting. The momentum is moving strongly in favor of our recommended digital message source. Based solely on its own merits, and on positive word-of-mouth publicity, Winlink 2000 is already a mature established worldwide network, which is currently experiencing a tremendous growth.

Accomplishments -- The ARESCOM Committee has been meeting, via the ARRL Teleconference Bridge, twice a month for approximately 90 minutes per session. Since its' formation on September 28, 2003, we have had nineteen regular sessions and one joint session with members of the Programs & Services Committee for a total of twenty eight and one half hours. This equates to 228 man hours in nine months. We have, through F&ES, issued two reports to the section managers, section emergency coordinators and section traffic managers proposing the use of Winlink 2000. We have done several PowerPoint Presentations geared to Winlink 2000. The purpose of these was to increase public awareness -- over and above that done via the ARRL Web, Reflectors and distribution of reports via F&ES. The in-person presentations resulted in a far greater number of people responding with favorable positive input than what was received after information was sent via electronic media.

An EchoLink conference has been set up via the W8FSM Conference Server and meets every Wednesday evening at 8 PM Eastern Time for all to join in discussions about Winlink 2000 ARES technical matters technical and other concerns.

A small ARRL HQ committee, consisting of Steve Ford, WB8IMY, Joe Carcia and Dan Miller, have put together a WINLINK 2000 demonstration for the P&SC and any other interested Board Members on Thursday July 15 2004.

Several Web articles have been published about Winlink 2000. Regardless of which viewpoint is portrayed, these are providing additional public awareness.

An ARES forum on Winlink 2000 was presented at Hamvention to an audience of over one hundred persons. Questions were answered and the end result was a favorable review with many requests for additional information.

An article entitled "Winlink for ARES" authored by Jerry Reimer, KK5CA, SEC of the South Texas Section, has been published in the August 2004 issue of QST in the Public Service Section with a continuation in September 2004. (Appendix A)

The three NTS Chairs, on June 28, 2004, sent a letter to all section managers embracing the Winlink 2000 Concept. ([Appendix B](#))

Overall, our findings indicate that information sent via email and first class U.S. Mail was not well received due to many misunderstandings, however personal presentations where questions could be answered on the spot proved to be extremely well accepted with many requests for additional information.

Recommendation -- Past experiences have shown that a national program must first prove its value and worth on a local basis before it can be rolled out over a larger area. This can only be achieved through the cooperative efforts of everyone who is to be involved in the end result. ARES and ARRL Section leadership, as well as those with technical software and hardware expertise must work together with public service agencies that are willing to do testing and experimentation.

For five years, the Winlink 2000 system has been successfully serving its users in the boating and RV areas 24x7. We aren't recreating the wheel. We are simply attempting to adapt an already proven communications network to meet the needs of the public service agencies and the needs of all organizations involved in providing disaster communications. This is currently being accomplished at the local levels with many of our Sections, and with the full cooperation and assistance of the Winlink Development Team. The digital network will provide a value added service for ARES and will continue to be viewed very positively by our served agencies. This allows ARES to be viewed as modern and necessary instead of antiquated and invasive.

Live presentations must continue to be offered, just as we've been doing this year, to capitalize on the tools which are working the best for us. In addition to our responsibility for making sure our ARES and Section leadership understand the need for stronger digital networking -- and that WINLINK 2000 already has the potential to meet the current emergency communications needs -- we must continue to expand our scope of awareness to include the technical experts and public service agencies. After all, it is these people who have responsibility for disaster preparedness in which we hope to serve. Through their desire to assist with this early stage of WINLINK 2000 development, we can 1) determine their specific needs, 2) address, modify and correct system shortcomings, and 3) begin to build a nationwide ARES Network based upon these successes.

In order for the WINLINK 2000 technology to permit effective public service the committee has determined that there must be a management strategy put in place to ensure uniform application and access of the system throughout the field organization.

The committee recommends that a robust educational and management effort be developed to ensure that ARES organizations at the local level provide the requisite interfaces, and are properly trained in providing those served with the support and guidance to use the system effectively.

It is recommended that the Board endorse the use of Winlink 2000 in the ARRL Field Organization as well as integrating ARES and NTS into one unified emergency communications team. This would require action by F&ES to create the organization and provide the education and leadership needed to insure its success.

Respectfully submitted,

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Appendix:

- A. August 2004 QST Article
- B. Letter to section managers from NTS Leadership
- C. ARES/NTS/NTSD/Winlink 2000, An Integrated Approach