

SARASOTA COUNTY



"Breaking The Silence: Providing Communications After Conventional Systems Fail"

The Sarasota County Auxiliary Communications Service (SARACS), previously operated as the Sarasota County (Florida) ARES/RACES organization, was reorganized under the ACS concept in August 2005. ACS acquired the call sign, WC4EM, in 2006.

ACS works closely with local Emergency Management, and they have designated ACS as their amateur radio partner and auxiliary communications service provider, tasked with recruiting, organizing, and deploying ham radio operators for emergency activations in Sarasota County. ACS operates as part of Emergency Support Function 2 (ESF 2, Communications). Any amateur radio operator in Sarasota County is eligible to join ACS, but members must meet certain training requirements. This training, which consists of Incident Command System (ICS) classes and ARRL Emergency Communications courses, complies with FEMA, Department of Homeland Security, State, and local directives for volunteers involved in emergency response. In part, because of our compliance with these training requirements, ACS has been recognized by the Federal Communications Commission's "Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau" for promoting "best practices" for emergency communications services.

In addition to providing emergency communications, and participating in emergency planning, exercises, and assisting Emergency Management staff, ACS has been involved in several other projects. ACS developed and teaches a communications module as part of the county's Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training program. ACS promotes amateur radio at these classes and for individuals interested in becoming licensed, ACS provides them with license study material and a VE exam session. ACS was involved in efforts to get the CERT teams more involved in providing preliminary damage assessment reports for the county. ACS was instrumental in getting permanently mounted amateur radio antennas installed at twenty-one of our county shelters, and for use during emergencies, ACS developed and built a cache of twenty amateur radio "jump kits". These self-contained "jump kits" consist of dual-band radios, power supply, battery, and battery charger, and can quickly be set up and used from shelter locations, portable locations, or mobile.

ACS operates the 443.550 repeater which is located at the Emergency Operations Center. Also operating from the EOC "radio room", is an HF station, the WC4EM-10 Winlink gateway, and the *SARACS* Echolink conference server. ACS holds a monthly ACS/CERT net to promote awareness, familiarization, and encourage communications between groups who may be working together during emergencies. The net also provides a training opportunity on net procedures and protocol for those CERT/Neighborhood hams who normally aren't active otherwise.

You can find out more about the Sarasota County Auxiliary Communications Service, by visiting our web site <http://www.saracs.org> or e-mail wd4ahz@saracs.org