

**The Strength Of  
Ventura County ACS/ARES  
Lies In Our 8 Local Areas**

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# 1 Introduction

It is apparent from a study of potential disasters that we face in Ventura County, our ability as ACS/ARES to respond to those disasters, and the services that we provide, that the strength of Ventura County ACS/ARES lies in our 8 Local Areas:

- Area 1 Simi Valley
- Area 2 Thousand Oaks and Conejo Valley
- Area 3 Camarillo
- Area 4 Oxnard
- Area 5 Ojai
- Area 6 City of Ventura
- Area 7 Santa Paula, Fillmore, and Piru
- Area 8 Moorpark

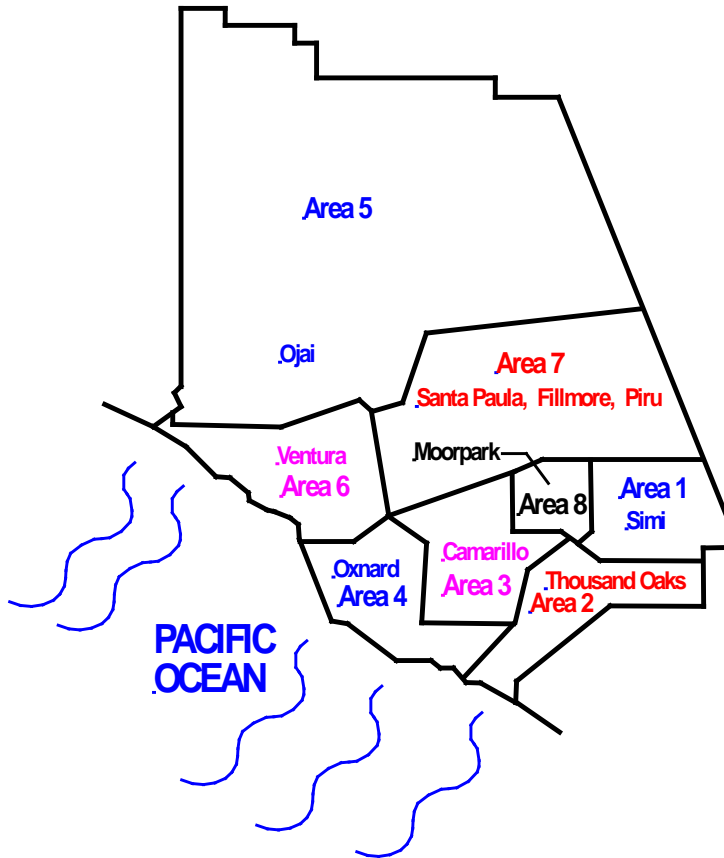


Figure 1 Ventura County 8 ACS/ARES Local Areas

## **2 ACS/ARES Members**

ACS/ARES members are all volunteers who devote a considerable amount of their own time and resources to the program.

In most cases, members have joined ACS/ARES to serve their local communities. They understand the unique problems that their individual communities face during natural and civil disasters and they want to help solve these problems.

The large rapid growth in Area 5 ACS/ARES membership is an excellent example. Ojai residents are well aware that in major storms, earthquakes, wild fires, etc., Ojai can quickly be cut off from the rest of the County. No one will be able to get into or out of Ojai. During disasters, Ojai residents know that they will have to take care of themselves, with little or no outside help. For these reasons they are volunteering in significant numbers for their local Red Cross, Community Emergency Response Team (CERT), and ACS/ARES teams. If Ojai is free of problems, will these volunteers be willing to serve in other parts of the County, if they can get there? Most certainly. But their local community comes first. Serving their local community is why they volunteered.

## **3 Assignment of ACS/ARES Members During Disasters**

The assumption that we can assign ACS/ARES members to locations anywhere in the County is not valid.

During an emergency many of our members will insist on assignments close to home, if their families and local communities are in harms way. They will not be willing to travel to other parts of the County. Their families will not allow it. Their own communities will loudly object to such proposed assignments. The local communities will demand that “their” ACS/ARES members remain in the community fighting the local disaster, particularly if the community paid for the local ACS/ARES program.

In a major disaster, such as an earthquake, our members may not be able to get to assignments far from home, assuming they are willing to go, because of traffic conditions and road closures.

Loss of the electrical power grid, as the result of an earthquake, terrorist attack, or other causes is a devastating disaster that can completely paralyze our communities and our way of life. Following a power grid failure, nothing works. All stores are closed. You can't buy food or other supplies. The banking system is closed down. You can't get money. The gas stations are all closed. You can't buy gas for your vehicles. Whatever fuel our ACS/ARES members have in their vehicles may be the only fuel that they will have for a week or more. Faced with this possibility, the only driving that our members will be willing to do is that necessary to protect the health and welfare of their individual

families. They will not be willing to drive to ACS/ARES assignments far from home. They can't.

Based on these realities, our ACS/ARES staffing plans must assume that during major disasters our members will be assigned to locations close to home. This means that each of our 8 Areas must assume that it will have to stand along during a major disaster. It must assume that no ACS/ARES help is coming from other Areas. Now in fact, other Areas will send help if they possibly can, but an Area's emergency response plan can not depend on that out of Area support. The requirement for each Area to be self sufficient directly impacts the number of local agencies that it supports. Each Area must agree to provide ACS/ARES emergency communication services only to those agencies which it can staff with its local ACS/ARES membership. Promising to provide local agencies with ACS/ARES support that must be staffed with members from outside the Area is very dangerous, even irresponsible, since there is no guarantee that staffing will ever arrive. There is no Area that better understands the reality of this situation than Area 5 (Ojai).

In a strange sort of way, this entire situation is very positive! When a community understands that no one from the outside is coming to their rescue, they begin to think about providing for their own survival. The community begins to take a serious interest in community emergency preparedness. People begin joining the local Red Cross Chapter, a serious CERT team evolves, and local ACS/ARES membership grows. The community learns to take care of itself. A very health result again exemplified by Ojai.

#### **4 ACS/ARES Is Critically Needed In The Local Communities**

When a large disaster hits, ACS/ARES will be critically needed in the local communities supporting the local police department, city government, hospitals, local schools, universities, and CERT/DART teams. We do not have to look for reasons for ACS/ARES to exist or for customers to serve. Those reasons and customers already exist in the local communities, and these communities very much want our help. When a large crisis occurs, the disaster recovery "battles" will be fought in the local communities. The services that we will be called upon to provide will include critical communications between and among Emergency Operation Centers (EOCs) and field sites, mobile units and from the local communities to the County. In many disaster scenarios we are the only organization in a position to provide these services, particularly in the early hours of a disaster. In addition, the local communities have a critical need for information on the scope and magnitude of the crisis in and around their community. Local EOC incident commanders are faced with the gut wrenching task of making life and death decisions with very little information on which to base those decisions. It is their worse nightmare. They are desperate for information on what is happening around them. ACS/ARES is in a unique position to collect and provide some of the needed information. These services are critical to disaster recovery in all of our communities. The local communities know this. That is why they want ACS/ARES.

Each Area is unique in the community problems that it must deal with. For example, Areas 4 and 6 (Oxnard and the City of Ventura) are the only two Areas that face a tsunami threat. Area 5 (Ojai) can be completely cut off from the rest of the County. Areas 6 and 7, particularly the communities of Piru, Fillmore, Santa Paula, and the City of Ventura, are at extreme risk of raging waters and severe flooding from the Santa Clara River during heavy rain storms. This situation can be aggravated by forced release of water from the Piru dam and even dam failure. Area 2 (Thousand Oaks) is the only Area that has a county line running through the middle of its metropolitan area. Areas 1, 2 and 8 (Simi, Thousand Oaks, and Moorpark) are probably the three Areas that have the most experience with fire storms actually getting down into the communities themselves. These three Areas understand their respective fire risks very well and what they will be called upon to do the next time a fire storm occurs.

It is the local area Emergency Coordinators (ECs) and their respective ACS/ARES teams that have the intimate knowledge of these local problems. This knowledge has evolved over the years by working closely with community agencies, organizations, and leaders on these problems, developing detailed community emergency response plans, and implementing those plans. No one understands the local problems better than the individual ECs and their respective teams.

## **5 Sizing The Local Area ACS/ARES Program**

As indicated above, each Area must promise ACS/ARES emergency communication services only to those local facilities (customers) that it can staff with its own local members. The success of an ACS/ARES team does not depend on the number of customers that it has, but only on the quality of service it provides to the facilities that it is able to staff. An Area that has only enough ACS/ARES members to staff a single facility, say the local hospital, may be far more successful than another Area with a dozen customers. It is quality of service provided that counts, not size.

Everyone likes being part of a “winning team”. When the local ACS/ARES team provides its one customer with outstanding service, word gets out! More amateur radio operators in the Area will want to become part of the winning team. Result, more ACS/ARES members. Additional customers in the community will want the same services being provided to the original customer, and they will be willing to pay for it. Success creates growth and more success.

## **6 Funding For ACS/ARES**

Communities are willing to fund their local ACS/ARES program if they see that program is focused on the needs of the community. That is, focused on the specific needs of their city, their hospital, their police department, etc. They will enthusiastically back the program when they are given an active role in determining the ACS/ARES services

provided in their community, how those services are provided, and allowed to integrate ACS/ARES into their own emergency response plans.

However, before providing this backing, the communities must be convinced that ACS/ARES is a for real emergency communication organization. They must see that ACS/ARES is successfully implementing a detailed Operations Plan that addresses their local needs. A published plan that they can pick up and read. A plan which adheres to the nationally mandated emergency management procedures that they are all familiar with. A plan which directly identifies and then provides solutions to what they perceive as their worst nightmares during a disaster.

ACS/ARES is cheap. The cost of the ACS/ARES radio equipment needed by each of the supported facilities in a community is small compared to the cost of their other emergency preparedness equipment and services. When you consider that ACS/ARES provides critically needed services that can not be obtained anywhere else, at any price, the return on investment in ACS/ARES is huge.

## **7 Managing An ACS/ARES Program Is A Huge Job**

When you consider all the emergency preparedness work that an Area EC and his team must accomplish, and then multiply that times 8 Areas, it is clear that the Ventura County ACS/ARES District Emergency Coordinator (DEC) can not handle a problem that large by himself, no matter who he is or how good he is. The problem becomes even more apparent when you consider the response to a large scale wide spread disaster encompassing the entire County. In such a situation, the number of really bad things happening all at once all over the County is well beyond the ability of any DEC to handle.

The only hope that a DEC has in orchestrating a successful ACS/ARES response to a large scale disaster is to rely on the knowledge, expertise, and local leadership of the Area ECs and their respective teams. Coordinating with each of the Areas during a disaster, understanding the scope of the problem in each Area and what is being done, working out mutual aid between the Areas (if such mutual aid is possible), getting this information to the Office of Emergency Services (OES), and providing guidance and assistance back to the individual Areas will be an all consuming task for any DEC. The details of actually implementing the ACS/ARES emergency communications response in each Area must be given to the local ECs. The Area ECs and their teams will be ready to do their part when the time comes if the focus of the ACS/ARES program is on the 8 Areas.

Small isolated emergencies centered in one location or another can easily be handled by the DEC drawing on ACS/ARES members from around the County to staff the operation. Such an approach, however, is counter productive. The only way to prepare for a large disaster is practice, practice, practice. We have to use the small incidents to practice, develop our procedures, and prepare for the larger events. That means relying on the

knowledge, expertise, and leadership of the Area ECs and their teams for all emergencies and events large and small.

## **8 Organizational Structure**

If the ACS/ARES program is to be focused on the 8 Areas, then there must be an organizational structure that covers the needs of each Area, ties the 8 Areas together into an integrated emergency communications system, and ties the entire program to OES.

The Nation Incident Management System (NIMS) recognizes that many organizations involved with disaster response will have two organizational structures, an Administrative structure to deal with the daily operation of the organization, and an Emergency Management structure which deals with the organization's response to actual disasters.

Nationally recognized Administrative and Emergency Management systems suitable for ACS/ARES already exist. There is no reason for ACS/ARES to invent its own. Amateur Radio Emergency Services (ARES) is an excellent Administrative System. The Incident Command System (ICS) defined by NIMS is the Emergency Management System that we are expected to follow during natural and civil disasters in accordance with FEMA mandates.

We have in fact implemented the ARES Administrative System, at least partially, for years. ARES is the basis for dividing our program into the 8 Local Areas. ARES defines the EC and DEC positions as well as the duties of each position. The duties identified by ARES are in fact the administrative duties that must be performed by the DEC and ECs to have a successful ACS/ARES program.

NIMS mandates use of the Incident Command System (ICS) for on-scene emergency management. Under the NIMS guide lines, each of our Areas becomes an ICS team dealing with the crisis occurring in its Area. The NIMS plan is very flexible. In some situations two or more Areas could be combined into a single ICS team based on the situation and available manpower. NIMS defines the means by which the individual ICS teams report up the chain of command to OES, receive direction from OES, and the process by which mutual aid is coordinated between our 8 Areas.

Together, the ARES Administrative organization and the ICS Emergency Management system provide the complete organizational structure needed to run a very successful ACS/ARES program based on the 8 Local Areas.

## **9 Consistent With The OES Mission**

An ACS/ARES program, administered by OES and focused on the 8 Areas, will provide each of the Ventura County communities with an excellent amateur radio emergency

communications system. A system that they each very much want and need, but which they can not easily provide themselves. Such a program is consistent with the OES mission.

## **10 Conclusion**

We can have a very successful ACS/ARES program if we focus on the 8 Areas and their local communities. The local communities very much want and need the emergency communication services that we provide. Funding for such a program is available from the local communities. Our members volunteered to help in their local communities. By focusing the ACS/ARES program on the 8 Areas, our members can serve in their local communities close to home. In a disaster, we will be able to staff our ACS/ARES positions because those positions are in the local Areas where our members live. In many cases they can walk to their assignments if need be. The administrative and emergency management organizational structures exist to manage an Area focused ACS/ARES program. Such a program is consistent with the OES mission.