

FAQ for Los Altos Hams

(frequently asked questions)

What does LAARES stand for?

- Los Altos Amateur Radio Emergency Service

What is LAARES?

- LAARES serves Los Altos by helping to recruit, train, and maintain a crew of amateur radio operators ready to provide emergency communication services in a time of need. LAARES is an informal group with a common interest in amateur radio and emergency preparation/community service. There are no chartering documents and no “affiliated with” documents, hence we have no insurance (aside from what is provided by DSW), no dues and no budget. Part of the training is providing communication support for community events as requested by the city, participating in drills organized by the county and city and the Monday night net..

What are the requirements for LAARES membership?

- We expect everyone to
 - Have an Amateur Radio License
 - Attend quarterly meetings
 - Attend training events as often as possible. (offered by LAARES, the county or other cities)
 - Apply for a Los Altos DSW (Disaster Service Worker) Card.
 - Maintain some level of a “Go-Kit” so you can help in case of an emergency situation.

How do I join?

- Give us your name, call, address, phone number (home and cell) and email address.
- Participate regularly in Monday night check-ins

There seems to be a lot of organizations and acronyms involved in all this. Who are they?

- LAARES – (Los Altos Amateur Radio Emergency Service) <http://www.laares.org/>
That’s us folks. We have quarterly meetings, training events and a Monday night check in to keep our equipment and skills current.
- SPECS – (Southern Peninsula Emergency Communications System) <http://www.specsnet.org/>
SPECS covers Stanford, Palo Alto, Los Altos Hills, Mountain View, Los Altos and Sunnyvale. They sponsor the W6ASH repeaters (145.270 MHz, minus offset, 224.140 MHz, minus offset, 440.800 MHz, positive offset, all use 100.0 Hz tone). These repeaters are open for use by all hams. SPECS has one or two meetings a year, various training events, a yearly flea market for fund raising and conducts the Monday night Net. You can, but are not required to join SPECS – your dues help support the repeater. Check their website for current dues and an application.
- SVECS – (Silicon Valley Emergency Communications System) <http://www.svecs.net/>
SVECS is SPECS’s sister organization. It covers the part of the county not covered by SPECS. SVECS sponsors the AA6BT repeater (146.115 MHz, plus offset, 100.0 Hz tone). Their repeater is open for use by all hams.
- ARRL – (American Radio Relay League) <http://www.arrl.org/>
ARRL is the national association of hams and the defender of the increasingly valuable radio spectrum we use.
- ARES (Amateur Radio Emergency Service) <http://www.arrl.org/FandES/field/pscm/sec1-ch1.html>
ARES consists of licensed amateurs who have voluntarily registered their qualifications and equipment for communications duty in the public service when disaster strikes. Every licensed amateur, regardless of membership in ARRL or any other local or national organization, is eligible for membership in the ARES. The only qualification, other than possession of an Amateur Radio license, is a sincere desire to serve.

- RACES (Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Services) was established by the FCC in 1952. RACES was envisioned to be a temporary service to provide radio communication for civil defense purposes. It is administered by local, county, and state civil defense organizations and is supported by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as well as the FCC.
- ACS (Auxiliary Communications Service)
<http://acs.oes.ca.gov/>
ACS is part of the California OES (Office of Emergency Service). It includes a broad spectrum of volunteer telecommunication experts, administrators and managers who provide emergency communications support to a sponsoring government, state, county or local. This can include commercial radio technicians and engineers, public safety and government communication specialists, FCC Licensed Amateurs directly and/or as the RACES, Civil Air Patrol communicators, satellite and telephone communications and electronics experts and technicians. You can see that ACS is a lot more than amateur radio.
- SCC ARES/RACES – Santa Clara County ARES/RACES <http://www.scc-ares-races.org/>
Every city in Santa Clara County has an ARES/RACES organization. For simplicity most refer to themselves as ARES. They all serve the same function for their city as LAARES does for Los Altos. SCC ARES/RACES is the similar function at the county level. Much of our training is provided by SCC ARES/RACES. Coordination of our ham activity outside of the city is done at the county level.
- DSW Card (Disaster Service Worker Card) is a photo id card issued by the city that identifies you as an Amateur Radio Operator. It is not a guarantee of any privileges. We take pictures for Los Altos DSW Cards at every LAARES meeting.
- MAC (Mutual Aid Communicator) is an experienced ham from a city ARES organization who has a County DSW Card, has received the required MAC training, and has volunteered to be dispatched by the county.
- County DSW Card is a photo id card issued by the county to identify you as an amateur radio operator when the county dispatches you as a MAC. It is not a guarantee of any privileges.
- CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) is not an amateur radio organization. The CERT program educates people about disaster preparedness for hazards that may impact their area and trains them in basic disaster response skills, such as fire safety, light search and rescue, team organization, and disaster medical operations. CERT classes are offered by most cities and are tailored somewhat to that city's needs and organization. Many hams are CERT trained. CERT training is not required but is recommended for LAARES members.
- FARS - Foothill Amateur Radio Society
<http://www.fars.k6ya.org/>
This is an Amateur Radio Club that covers most aspects of amateur radio, not just emergency communications. In addition to their monthly meeting with a guest speaker, they have a monthly Amateur Radio Technology Day at SLAC. You are encouraged to check them out by visiting several of their gatherings.
- ICS (Incident Command System)
http://www.fema.gov/pdf/emergency/nims/ics_100_fs.pdf
ICS is a well documented procedure for first responders to manage incidents – both large and small. It is equally adaptable to a large wild land fire or a local isolated incident. It is used extensively by all fire departments in this area. It is mandatory training for hams in emergency communications. This training is available periodically as classroom training and all the time as online training – starting with the above URL.