

Originally founded as part of the United States Civil Defense Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES) well over twenty years ago, your local Auxiliary Communications Service (ACS) continues to adapt to and embrace changes in organizational structure and technology to provide one of the best local event, disaster or emergency communications services available to your community.

Organizationally, the original RACES group aligned through the Rancho Cucamonga Fire Protection District for support. However, as part of the Civil Defense service, the order to activate any RACES unit requires a presidential directive. To better support the communities of Rancho Cucamonga and Upland, the original RACES unit restructured into an auxiliary communications group through an affiliation with the San Bernardino County Fire Department's Emergency Communications Service (ECS). Activation of the unit could now occur at the state or county level. Membership in the local group required membership in the ECS. This standardized training and upgraded the level of service available to the local communities through the county's mutual aid agreements with other communications groups within the county.

In 2013, the unit once again reorganized into the Auxiliary Communications Service. While retaining an affiliation with the county's ECS, membership in the ACS no longer required county membership. Through agreements with the Montclair, Upland and Rancho Cucamonga fire departments, the ACS became the primary communications response unit in those communities providing radio support to local events as well as supplementing each fire department's disaster or emergency communications response capabilities. The membership age dropped from 21 years old to 16 years old (with parental or guardian written permission) and training standards were adopted that could be taught at the local level. The most beneficial result of this change allows for unit deployment at the local government level.

As changes within the Montclair and Upland Fire Departments occurred, the Rancho Cucamonga Fire Protection District assumed oversight of the unit with respect to background checks, formal standardization of training, volunteer disaster service worker agreements and other personnel-related activities which significantly facilitate the acceptance and deployment of ACS members into local emergency operations centers, staging areas or other designated areas to establish, sustain and maintain communications plans on-demand and as-required by the host agency.

Technologically, the ACS depends on volunteers willing to use their equipment "in the field" when necessary. Some basic high frequency, very high frequency and ultra high frequency radio equipment has been dedicated for ACS use through local government agreement but by far, the individual's personal equipment supplements the unit in areas exceeding basic radio communications. Advances in technology allow our members to transmit and receive data on amateur radio frequencies in a wide variety of formats which include slow scan video images, e-mails, text messages and GPS locations. Amateur radio operators can establish mesh networks via radio, essentially establishing a local area network linking computers in real-time with each other. Additionally, by using amateur radio equipment and resources, the ACS has the capability of establishing a local Internet link without the need for an Internet service provider. As technology advances, so do the capabilities of the ACS volunteers.

The Auxiliary Communications Service always seeks motivated individuals willing to obtain and retain an FCC-issued amateur radio operator's license. With three entry-level classes held each year (and one upgrade class), the ACS will work with you to keep you updated and trained, but only you can decide to participate. We encourage anyone to attend our general membership meetings and meet the radio operators who serve in your community.

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