



WCF ARES® Communicator

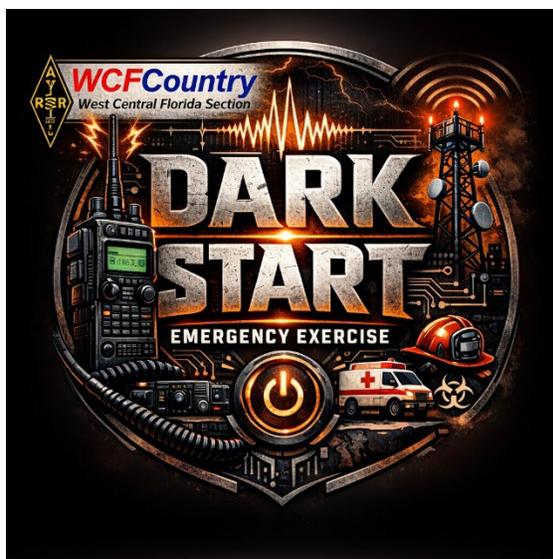
Simulated Emergency Test – Exercise DARK START
Simple – Focused- Effective

March 2026

Fellow ARES® Members,

[This month we have guest author, Christine Duez, K4KJN, EC Polk County updating us on our highly successful Simulated Emergency Test – DARK START.

Many Emergency Coordinators and Managers find that writing and executing a Simulated Emergency Test (SET) is a daunting undertaking. The ARRL West Central Florida Section is privileged to have Chuck Johnston, W4CWJ in our midst. He has written several SETs and participated in emergency activities both in Florida and other states. We would like to present a blueprint that can be useful and adaptable to many needs.



Our scenario consisted of a cascading power outage throughout the State of Florida resulting in the loss of all primary, alternate, and contingency communications capabilities. Under the scenario, our 10 counties and several volunteer organizations assisting in disasters (VOADs) participated. For added interest, the theme of the SET was not announced until the night before. Dark Start was written to accomplish several section goals.

Initially, we needed to validate the MOU between the ARRL West Central Florida Section and the owners of the multi-county NI4CE repeater system. This agreement allows us to communicate with all ten counties

in the West Central Florida (WCF) section. All counties can send and receive transmissions directly from an Area Command center. This not only facilitates information arriving in a timely manner, it avoids relaying information and possible miscommunications. Our SET scenario involved a cascading blackout caused by a fire at a transformer station. The NI4CE system executed a rollcall for all counties. Each county then returned to their own county system to activate their ARES group and reported back to the Area Command using the NI4CE system. Each county was tasked with reporting the number of individuals participating in each county, how many could operate on emergency power and how many were willing to deploy. Although it was a simple drill, it was very effective in pointing out areas that needed fortification before an emergency arose.

“Our second goal, since emergencies are not regular occurrences and many ARES groups seldom experience emergency activation, was to provide ARES members with need training and review to keep skills and procedures already learned fresh. SETs also introduce new members to the ARES environment. This SET was simple to create and execute while reviewing valuable lessons of importance and possibly lifesaving knowledge.

Another objective was to build familiarity and expertise between ARES groups and key management positions during emergency conditions. During the SET several of our section’s ECs

Section Cabinet

Section Manager

Darrell Davis, KT4WX

Assistant Section Manager

Section Emergency

Coordinator

Section Traffic Manager

Dave Rockwell W4PXE

Assistant Section Manager

Technology

Technical Coordinator

Darrell Davis, KT4WX

Assistant Section Managers

Jimmy Russ, AB4KA

Mike Douglas, W4MDD

Randy Payne K4EZM

Paul Toth NB9X

Russ Delaney N4RTD

Doug Williams N2DW

Mike Lunsford KB4FHP

Chuck Johnston W4CWJ

Dee Turner, N4GD

Christine Duez K4KJN

William Miller N1CDO

Dan Noah WX4DAN

Chris Bloxsom, AA4CB

gathered at the DeSoto County Emergency Operations Center and formed the Peace River Coordinating Group. The group included several Emergency Management directors and VOAD members who joined to observe the exercise. During a “hot wash” immediately following the SET, several members expressed concerns about “ham speak.” Many from the Coordinating Group advocated for “plain talk.” For example: what is a “mobile unit?” Is that a radio for the car, or does it mean the EM has to plan for an operator’s food and accommodation? ECs and ARES leaders were asked for plans to contact ARES groups for sudden activation. Another question was communications with CERT groups. Many use GMRS radio, how can they be used to a greater extent in emergencies. Several ideas and programs were mentioned and considered during the “hot wash.” Several members showed interest in both GMRS and Winlink uses during emergencies.

In conclusion: the aim of any SET is to practice emergency procedures and test your equipment’s capabilities. All our counties took part and reported their members were excited to participate. Many of the problems discovered have already been addressed and corrected. Those who participated in the Peace River Coordinating Group were very pleased with the exercise. Seeing how ARES works and what benefits it can bring them during emergencies gave the Group new appreciation for ARES and how it can be a valuable part of the emergency team on those “dark sky days.”

WCF ARES In Action:



A group of our Emergency Coordinators (EC) met at the DeSoto County Emergency Operations Center to form the Peace River Coordinating Group (PRCG). They were joined by several Emergency Management (EM) professionals who came to observe the ARES team participating in SET DARK START.

The EM members were quite impressed with the ARES team’s professionalism and cooperation. Members of the PRCG look forward to forming a sustaining working relationship in the Peace River area.

Special thanks to Chuck Johnston, W4CJV, and Sanford Wyatt, KM4WXX, for serving on the exercise simulation (SIM) team as well as their duties at PRCG.

Peace River Coordinating Group. (l to r) Sanford Wyatt, KM4WXX, SARG & ESF-12 SIM; Darell Davis, KT4WX Hardee EC; Kathryn Thompson, Sarasota EM logistics; Christine Duez, Polk County EC; Doug Christ, KN4YT, DeSoto County EC; Marc Purvis, KJ4UTU, DeSoto County EM, Marc Purvis, KJ4UTU, DeSoto County EM, Assistant Director; Stacy Alosio, City of North Port EM Manager; Chuck Johnston W4CWJ, WCF ASEC & SARG; Nicole Double, Sarasota County EM Mass Care Manager “EM-2”; Dennis O’Hara, DeSoto County EM Director. (ARRL WCF Photo by Duwain Hunt, W8JJV)

Upcoming ARES Events:

| Dates | Event |
|--|---|
| February 28, 2026, 8:45 AM | WCF 12 th Annual Technical Conference (TECHCON), Hillsborough County Public Safety Complex, 9450 E. Columbus Drive, Tampa FL 33619. (Evening Social, February 27 th 6:00 PM – 9:00 PM. Location (TBD) |
| Mar. 21, 2026, 0900 Eastern | WCF Section ARES Quarterly Meeting, via Zoom. (Rescheduled to get inputs from DARK START SET.) |
| May 23, 2026 (Tentative), 1300 Eastern | WCF Section ARES Quarterly Meeting, in-person, venue to be determined (we welcome volunteers to host.) |

Call to Action:

Also, we need our ARES team to submit events of interest to all ARES members or specific counties. These could be public service events, community events, or social events. Please submit events at least 60 days prior so we can make sure they are listed in the next published Communicator.

We need pictures and descriptions of ARES events to include in our ARES In Action segment. Show off your ARES team. These can be exercises, drills, or just weekly/monthly meetings. We would really like to see ARES members in action providing COMMs at an event, maintaining equipment, or participating in training. Include member names and call signs, so we can caption the photos correctly and give our members the credit they deserve. Remember to ask their permission to use the photo. We especially like to see members wearing their logo shirts and/or reflective vests. Try not to look like an antenna farm. Also, give us a short description of the event.

We are looking for a venue for our May ARES In-Person Meeting. Let us know if your group/facility would like to host the meeting.

Sincerely,
Dave Rockwell, W4PXE
Section Emergency Coordinator
ARRL® West Central Florida Section
Email: w4pxe@arrl.net





ARES Field Reports

[Logout](#) David Rockwell, W4PXE, WCF SEC

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Form 4 - ARES Monthly SEC Report

[Print this page](#)

Success! The following information was submitted by David Rockwell, W4PXE, WCF SEC for **West Central Florida, January, 2026.**

| | |
|--|-----|
| Total number of ARES members: | 397 |
| Difference in ARES members from previous month: | N/D |
| Number of DECs/ECs reporting this month: | 7 |
| Total number of DECs/ECs in section: | 9 |
| Number of ARES net sessions held: | 40 |
| Number of ARES net sessions held with NTS liaison: | 16 |
| Number of participants in nets: | 829 |

| | Number | Person-Hrs |
|--------------------------------------|--------|------------|
| Exercises this month: | 2 | 119.00 |
| Training events this month: | 6 | 154.00 |
| Public service events this month: | 0 | 0.00 |
| Community service events this month: | 3 | 688.00 |
| Emergency events this month: | 0 | 0.00 |
| SKYWARN events this month: | 226 | 199.00 |
| Meetings this month: | 11 | 209.00 |
| Unclassified events this month: | 11 | 30.00 |

Call signs of DECs reporting:

W4PXE

Activity Details:

CHARLOTTE COUNTY-----

Monthly meeting on January 19, 5 pm - 8 pm.

Presentation on NXDN and plans.

Approximately 25 attended.

Simplex hurricane drill on January 29, 25 attendees. 3 Hospitals manned.

DESOTO COUNTY-----

ARES worked Winter Field Day.

HARDEE COUNTY-----

Conducted four sessions of the Hardee County ARES Net on Monday January 5, 12, 19, and 26. Had a total of 16 check-ins for a total of 51 minutes net time. Total volunteer time for nets was 1.0

hours.

MANATEE COUNTY-----

The monthly Membership Meeting of the Manatee County Emergency Support Group, Inc. (ARES/RACES) was held at the Bible Baptist Church of Bradenton on 1/27/2026. Following introduction of new members and visitors, we were honored to introduce Dave Rockwell, W4PXE the WCF Section Emergency Coordinator. We then heard announcements from the EC and all the AECs. The Feature of the Month was titled, "The EmComm Jeopardy Game". The Question of the Month was, "What happens if our MCESEG leaders are not able to get on the air to get us organized?" A monthly EmComm Staff (AEC's, Deputies, and Liaisons) Meeting was held via Zoom on 1/7/2026.

The monthly MCESEG, Inc. Board of Directors Meeting was held via Zoom on 1/13/2026.

We held "HF Day" on the MAN-10 Repeater on 1/14/2026.

A New Member Orientation Training Session was held on 1/20/2026.

An EOC Work Party was held in the EOC Planning Room on 1/21/2026.

The Radio Estate Sale for KF4CSM/SK has returned a total to date of \$6192 to the estate.

The "MARCI Radio Project" is complete and the new MAN-2 Repeater is open for routine amateur use. County Administrator Charlie Bishop has expressed his appreciation to the Radio Division and Emergency Management for their support.

Our Giving Partner profile has been wholly revised and accepted for the April Giving Challenge. This bi-annual fund-raising event is scheduled for a 24-hour period from Noon-to-noon April 14-15 with matching funds from the Patterson Foundation.

PINELLAS COUNTY-----

In January PinCo ACS held 4 training and maintenance events at the EOC.

POLK COUNTY-----

Participated in SET DARK START, 23 check-ins, 20 emergency power capable, 3 deployable.

SARASOTA COUNTY-----

1-3-26 SRQARES Members meeting 11 @ 2.5 hours ea
1-10-26 1/2 Marathon 8 @ 8.5 hours ea
1-24-26 WFD 3 @ 5.5 hours ea

WCF ARES 80 Meter Net-----

201 R N4NOA 14 BRANDON FL FEB 1
DAVE ROCKWELL W4PXE
ST PETE FL
BT
WCF 80 METER ARES NET
SESSIONS 5 QNI 103 TIME
41 MINUTES X 73
BT
BILL N4NOA
AR

Official Emergency Stations-----

Sanford Wyatt, KM4WXX, Sarasota
WCF Ares net 274 Minutes. WCF NTS Eagle Net 2026.

John Snow, W3ATR, Manatee
Daily ck-in to S FL ARES Net 3940
Weekly ck-in to WCF Monday and Saturda
Completed HF antenna project at another EOS station
Developing a training drill for MCESG ARES/RACES members
AEC Logistics SRQ ARES
Liaison between MCESG and SRQ ARES

John Hubbard, AD4ZH, Manatee
Attended 4 tactical nets & 2 SKYWARN nets
Attended Em Comm meeting
Setup an antenna for field use.

William Johnson, N4NOA, Hillsborough
QNI AND NCS HILLSBOROUGH ARES NET- 5
QNI WCF 80 METER NET-5
QNI WCF UHF ARES NET -4

Tim Gardner, KO4IHP, Sarasota
an 5th - Check-in to WCF ARES Net, Traffic Handled =1, Time = 37 mins. on NI4CE
Jan 12th - Check-in to WCF ARES Net, Traffic Handled = 1, Time =33 mins, on NI4CE
Jan 19th - Check-in to WCF ARES Net, Traffic Handled = 1, Time = 29 mins. on NI4CE
Jan 26th - Check-in to WCF ARES Net, Traffic Handled = 1, Time - 38 Mins. on NI4CE

Larry Gispert, KR4X, Hillsborough
O.E.S. Report for January 2026 from KR4X
checked in 5 times to the WCF ARES EC/OES Net on 3.940 MHz
Checked in 5 times to the SFL ARES Net on 3.940 MHz
checked in 1 time to the WCF Info Net on 442.550 MHz
checked in 4 times to the CGCWOA CW Net on 14.052 MHz
total activity 15 hours and 0 miles driven

Administrative and Other Comments:

CHARLOTTE COUNTY-----
Submitted by James Nelson, W4AII, AEC, jim3nelson@yahoo.com.

DESOTO COUNTY-----
Submitted by Doug Christ, KN4YT, EC, kn4yt@yahoo.com.

HARDEE COUNTY-----
Ken Evers W9KBE is continuing communications with Hardee County Emergency Management concerning acquisition of antennas and feed-lines for the radio room in the new Emergency Operations Center. Submitted by Darrell Davis, Kt4WX, EC, kt4wx@arrl.net.

MANATEE COUNTY-----
Our annual "Participation Review" resulted in the membership revocation of nine volunteers. Our New Year 2026 Membership Metrics are;
1) 47 Active Members
2) 38 Qualified (81%) - 17 at Level 1, 18 at Level 2, 6 at Level 3
3) Amateur Licensees: 24 Extra, 3 Adv, 11 Gen, 9 Tech
A host of reference documents, training materials and Monthly Membership Proceedings can be found on our website; WWW.MCESG.ORG
For more details, please feel free to contact me anytime by phone or text at (727) 542-4729 or by email at spark003@live.com

Steve Park, W4OEP

Submitted by Steve Park, W4OEP, EC, spark003@live.com.

PINELLAS COUNTY-----

Submitted by Will Scott, W7WMS, AEC, will.w7wms@gmail.com.

POLK COUNTY-----

Dark Start was a great learning experience. Well-done Chuck Johnston, W4CWJ. Submitted by Christine Duez, K4KJN, Polk County EC, cduetz10@yahoo.com.

SARASOTA COUNTY-----

Submitted by Mike Kearney, KG7KIQ, Sarasota EC, mbk7@comcast.net.

*Send comments or questions about this page to [ARES Support](#).
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