



Introduction to the Army's "MARS 101"

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Since 9/11/2001 the bulk of government’s disaster response mechanism has undergone wrenching change at virtually every level. Army MARS needed no such wholesale reorganization. Its sharpened focus on disaster response began years previously when the catastrophic Northridge earthquake battered southern California.

In the 1994 Northridge disaster, the just-adopted Army MARS task of Incident Notification (EEI) reporting made its debut. With that, emergency response regained its primary role after the years devoted mostly to handling MARSgrams and phone patches for America’s servicemen abroad.

Today’s situation is pretty much the other way around. The sheer totality of change at the agencies Army MARS exists to support is now requiring a comparable update of MARS priorities and procedures. The document “Army MARS: the Road Ahead” initiates that process.

MARS 101 was developed by a task force of senior members to accomplish five objectives:

1. Introduce the Road Ahead Initiative *to* the members and gather feedback *from* them. (CAM approved in Chief’s Broadcast 2/13/09)
2. Bring all leaders and members in all states and regions onto the same page with respect to Army MARS priorities and practices.
3. Replace an inadequate system of continuing education that is based on random net participation and numbing repetition of dated training materials.
4. Establish an annual license re-qualification process that is quick, fair, and uncomplicated. It will consist of all members completing a refresher course similar to this one. The idea is to assure continuing uniformity of operation throughout the system.
5. Provide a concise prospectus of Army MARS qualifications and services to potential customers

While completion of the MARS 101 and its annual increments will be an unbending requirement for continuing as a member of MARS, this is not an end in itself. Rather, it is preparation for a new relationship with the agencies we support.

The initial “101” consists of 12 weekly units each comprising a written training document sent to members by e-mail on Wednesdays followed by one-hour discussion nets based on this material. These nets will take place on the following Sunday, Monday or Tuesday as scheduled by Region and State Directors. Discussion nets will be organized to keep “class size” at a manageable level so all members can participate in the give-and-take.

Participation in at least one of these nets is mandatory, but scheduling of several HF and VHF duplicate nets will offer some flexibility.

MARS 101 will run in two “semesters”: March 2-29 (five weeks) and April 6-May 18 (seven weeks). The discussion nets will take a mid-way break over Easter week. A written open-book exam will be taken at the end of the course by e-mail.

If necessary to accommodate 100 per cent participation, a second 101 cycle will be operated subsequently.

The 12 units will cover:

1. Overview of the **MARS mission** as it has been redefined since 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina.
2. **The Road Ahead program**: why, how and by whom drafted; detail of major provisions.
3. Review of **basic organization and operation** of Army MARS: HQ staff assignments, chain of command, special staff, AAA9USA operation, etc.
4. **What’s expected of members** in the newly-evolved MARS, including the list of activities that MARS now undertakes (Emergency Response Teams, upgraded Incident Notification reporting, Supported Agency Augmentation, etc.) Review of participation requirements.
5. **Working with supported agencies**: The concept of *real-world* interoperability, accenting the professionalism required now that we work alongside EMCOMM professionals
6. Inside **Winlink** (refresher on operation of basic station with Pactor I or III.).
7. **Incident Notification Reporting**. The upgraded new-model EEI will be a priority item. This is a task that engages every member in a vital early-warning mission which only MARS as a nationwide organization can undertake.
8. **Net operation** with emphasis on flexibility of rapidly reconfigured, operation-focused nets as emergency situations develop across state, region and agency boundaries.
9. **Net Control Station** skills, with specific assignments to each participant for NCS duty a subsequent net.
10. **NIMS Qualification**. Overview of courses to be required of all members, emphasizing recent updates in FEMA doctrine.
11. **Advancement and Recognition** update.
12. **Initiative and Imagination**: Review of the course plus free discussion based on the individual members’ own decision-making responsibility in the face of disaster. (There are excellent readings on this.)

There is no question but that the Road Ahead initiative requires a heightened level of commitment and effort on the part of all members. That's the inescapable consequence of our heightened role in homeland security. As the Road Ahead document points out, use of the word "amateur" in Army MARS refers only to the class of FCC license required for membership; in all other respects we are expected and required to be professionals in the larger sense of that word, working alongside the professionals in the agencies we serve. MARS 101 is the first step along that road.

THANKS to the Army MARS Tiger Team who developed this Road Ahead upon the request of the Chief, Army MARS.

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