

SLCo ARES® 2026 Continuity Cup After-Action Report



Salt Lake County ECC staffers receive briefing at start of 2026 Continuity Cup

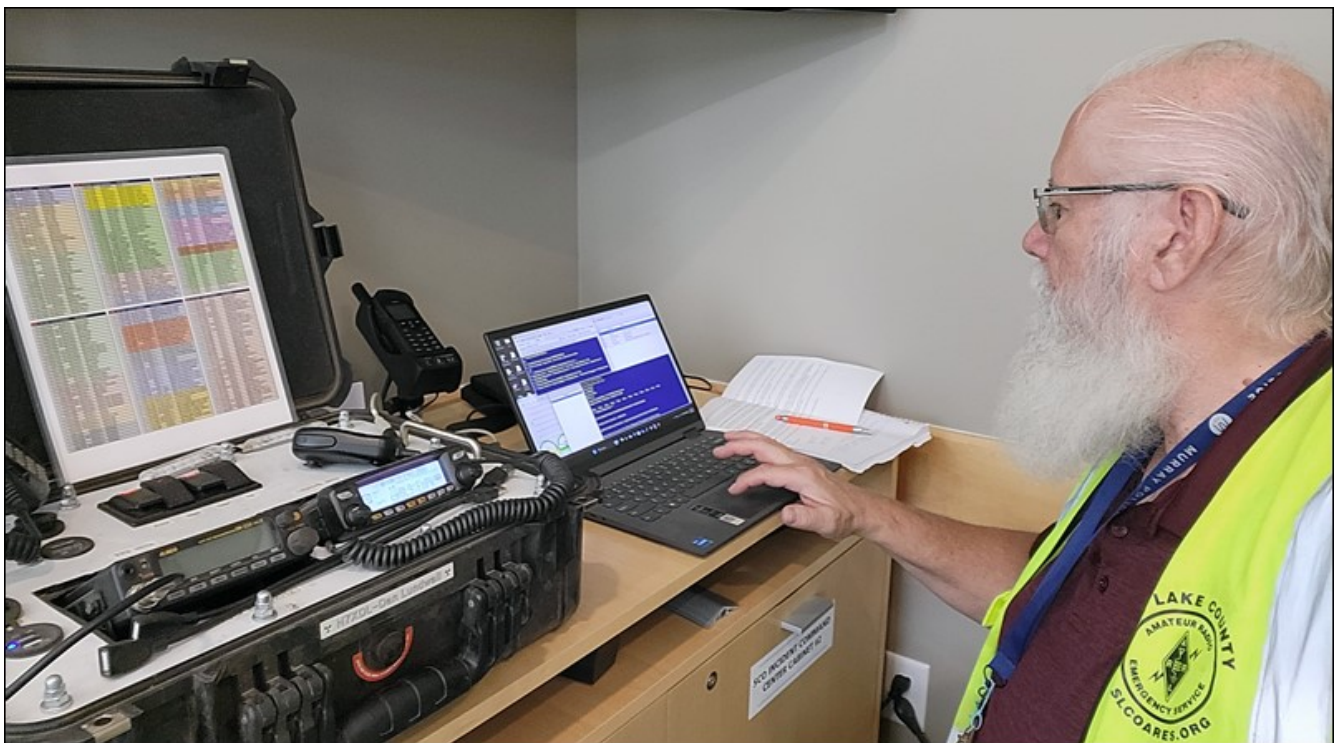
Salt Lake County (SLCo) ARES® conducted an exercise starting at 1000 MT on September 24, 2026, coinciding with the final day of Salt Lake County Emergency Management's 2026 Continuity Cup. The "Cup" is a three-day exercise to test cooperation and interoperability among jurisdictions and agencies in the county.

Because the third day would include fully-staffed ESF positions at the county's Emergency Coordination Center (pictured above,) SLCo ARES® chose to seize that rare opportunity to demonstrate delivery of simulated facility status reports from Intermountain Health (IH) hospitals to the county health department at ESF-8 without reliance on conventional networks.

Preparation

Three of IH's five acute-care hospitals in the county have vacancies at the Emergency Manager (EM) position, so participation was limited to Primary Children's (PCH) and LDS Hospitals in Salt Lake County, and the IH Supply Chain Center, a central warehouse in Midvale. Reports were prepared as follows:

- LDS Hospital - EM Jo Loter was unavailable the day of the exercise, so she prepared a standard HICS 251 status report in advance, and sent it by email to Paul Plack, AE4KR for transmission during the drill.
- PCH - EM Ashley Packard met Vern Reed, K7VMR at the PCH command center, and prepared an HICS 251 form within the Winlink app on Vern's computer, making it available for transmission.
- Supply Chain Center - Dan Lundwall, N7XDL participated from the warehouse's Timpanogos Conference Room and drafted an ordinary Winlink message containing a simulated status report.



Dan Lundwall, N7XDL of SLCo ARES®, ready to transmit report via Winlink from IH Supply Chain

Report Deliveries and Challenges

Due to prior commitments, AE4KR was unavailable by radio at the time of the exercise. The report from LDS Hospital was therefore sent over Winlink via Telnet (internet) to the WL2K server at 0745, for retrieval later in the morning at the ECC using a radio connection. Reports from K7VMR and N7XDL were readied for real-time transmission to the ECC.

Normal Winlink message transmission uses Radio Message Servers (RMS) which receive messages by radio, then relay them via internet to the central WL2K

Common Message Server (CMS) to wait for retrieval. In the event of a disaster, an RMS located outside the boundaries of a local internet outage allows using ham radio to bridge the outage and continue to pass messages.

On the morning of the drill, none of the three RMS we normally use, including two in Sandy and one in Davis County, were responding. K7VMR and N7XDL were able to switch to Winlink peer-to-peer (P2P) mode, which bypasses servers in favor of a direct connection, and deliver their reports. AE4KR's report from LDS Hospital had already been sent to the network, so it was too late to choose P2P. Fortunately, one of the RMS in Sandy resumed functioning about 1020 MT.



Vern Reed, K7VMR of SLCo ARES® confers with SLCo ECC by radio to resolve technical issues

K7VMR's transmission from PCH was delayed by a stubborn technical issue. The message was finally sent successfully after a change in a setting which allowed the laptop to successfully command the radio to transmit.

Take-Aways

ARES® members successfully demonstrated the ability to relay facility status reports expected by the SLCo Health Department from hospitals in printed form. While successful, some new issues and questions remain.



David Buell, NN7RM of SLCo ARES® awaits receipt of a report via Winlink at the ECC

- Unreliability of Winlink RMS - Sending Winlink messages exclusively in P2P mode requires the sending and receiving station to be available at the same time. An RMS allows messages to be originated at the convenience of the sending station, and retrieved at the convenience of the recipient. Salt Lake County ARES® will consider developing its own, more robust RMS nodes.
- Reliable Deployment of Winlink Stations - The equipment troubles experienced by K7VMR at PCH are typical when switching a single radio between voice and data service. One possible solution is a small module (AIOC, "all-in-one cable") that turns an inexpensive second radio into a dedicated data radio. We have ordered two AIOC modules for evaluation.
- Non-Standard HICS 251 Forms - An HICS 251 as downloaded from its developers at the California Hospital Association (CHA) is an extremely detailed, six-page PDF form. The version native to Winlink is a single HTML page, despite sharing the same name. It will be necessary to see if the shorter form used in the exercise satisfies the needs of the SLCo Health Department. If the longer form is required, the resulting attachment size may exceed the limit for Winlink.
- Appropriate Routing of Reports - The normal flow of hospital status reporting goes through IH's internal communications center, where reports are merged for transmission to the health department. It may be necessary to establish a ham station at that communications hub to maintain the anticipated flow of reporting for hospital staff, and limit the

volume of individual facility reports hitting the county's ESF-8 desk.

- Using Expected HICS/ICS Titles - IH assigns its hospital emergency managers as Liaison Officers in the HICS structure. Within the IH network, an HICS 251 would be signed using the title, "Emergency Manager." In a report directly to an outside government agency, it may be necessary to instead use "Liaison Officer," to ensure that replies arriving after the sender has left the command center will be correctly forwarded.

Action Items

SLCo ARES® will need to consult with these parties:

- IH management - To determine what the reporting flow will be in real emergencies, and whether the IH communications center will need ARES® support.
- SLCo Health Department - To determine whether the short HICS 251 form native to Winlink will suffice for facility reports arriving directly from hospitals, whether the longer CHA version or custom form will be required, and whether direct reporting via ham radio is necessary or useful in a grid-down emergency.
- SLCo Emergency Management - To determine whether strict adherence to ICS titles is important, or whether internal hospital management titles will suffice on official forms.

Salt Lake County ARES® can test and resolve the following issues independently:

- Evaluate the cost-effectiveness and utility of dedicated data-only radios using the AIOC (or similar) interface.
- Consider and plan the creation and siting of more robust Winlink RMS in Salt Lake County.