

MERT

Marion County Emergency Radio Team



Marion County Sheriff's Office
Division of Emergency Management

COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

July 2024

MERT's primary role is to support all open Evacuation Shelters throughout Marion County during declared Emergency events. We also support EOC and emergency personnel along with Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) with voice, image and data communications resources. ***"Call MERT... When all else fails!"***

MERT Monthly Meeting

The next meeting is on July 20th @ 10:00 am.

All Amateur Radio operators are Welcomed!

Hurricane Season is here



Harlan Cook (KN4VRM)
MERT Coordinator

"NOAA National Weather Service forecasters at the Climate Prediction Center predict above-normal hurricane activity in the Atlantic basin this year. NOAA's outlook for the 2024 Atlantic hurricane season, which spans from June 1 to November 30, predicts an 85% chance of an above-normal season, a 10% chance of a near-normal season and a 5% chance of a below-normal season." NOAA 5/23/24

Ugh... certainly not the sort of "news" anyone likes to learn!

With this update and consistent with previous years activities, members ramped up activities this spring verifying our equipment is ready and complete, conducted 8 Shelter inspections, identified any improvements or changes required and continued specific training in refamiliarization with our equipment. Another key action is revisiting our procedures and documentation insuring each is consistent with best practices and is up to date with the latest information.

I am especially proud sharing several members have made significant contributions who followed through and lead key events, classes and activities. My sincere thanks to each of you for your commitment to see we meet and exceed our Mission and Goals outlined by the Division of Emergency Management. My sincere thanks to all!

"Your talent determines what you can do. Your motivation determines how much you're willing to do. Your attitude determines how well you do it" — Lou Holtz



MERT needs YOU!

Meeting Documentation Manager Position Open

We sincerely thank Gray Moffett (KC3DWY) for filling this position over the last 2 years. Gray’s support included conducting our “MERT Annual Meeting Report” and the “Annual Highlights” Summary of 2022 and 2023.



Gray Moffett
KC3DWY

What does the Meeting Documentation Manager do? This individual completes an annual report of the Annual Activity Highlights and conducts the Annual Meeting. If you can help for 5 hours **per year**, please contact the MERT Coordinator or Assistant Coordinator. ***Thank You Gray for your great support over the last two years!***

Shelter Emergency Radio Kit (SHREK) Update



MERT SHREK Kit

The faulty microphone cables and two headphones along with a couple missing connectors were replaced with all SHREK Kits now 100% stocked, radios reprogrammed, tested and ready for use.

Additionally, all the Kits have been moved in the MERT warehouse to the lowest shelf making them easier and safer to access in the future.

A big thanks to Gary Neron, Nick Kiddey and Ray Woody for the excellent teamwork in completing this relocation.



Thanks to Gary Neron, Nick Kiddey and Ray Woody for the SHREK kit relocation for easier access & safety.

“Great opportunities to help others seldom come, but small ones surround us every day.” – Sally Koch

In coordination with the Marion County Public School personnel and Rob Morris (Division of Emergency Management & MERT Advisor), MERT Members completed eight Shelter Inspections & System Tests on May 29th, 2024.

Testing was conducted at eight (8) Shelters: Belleview High School, Forest High School, Liberty Middle School, Lake Weir High School, Madison Street Elementary, Saddlewood Elementary, Vanguard High School and West Port High School.

Findings:

Forest High School: Testing found the MERT antenna connection had been moved by school personnel (date unknown and not approved by MERT). Besides the location not being approved by MERT for use, the radio operating tests was not 100% successful. It is suspected the antenna relocation was not done correctly. This site requires follow up for antenna relocation to a site allowing table, chair, power/emergency power and space for a cot (for extended activations), MERT cannot support activations at this Shelter until modifications are made.

Madison Street Elementary: Testing was overall successful but there was no cell service or school Wi-Fi available. Additionally, the emergency power outlet is over 100 ft away and there is not space for a cot (for extended activations). No generator on campus.

Saddlewood Elementary: Testing was successful but no emergency power outlets available and no generator on campus.

















Vanguard High School: Testing was successful but there is no space for a cot (for extended activations).

West Port High School: Testing was successful but there is no air conditioning and no fan in the room and the floor was littered with debris and had ants crawling around.



**We thank Leon Jurcyszyn (K8ZAG)
Technical Advisor & Past Coordinator
and Pat Davis (KQ4BRW)
Administration & New Member
Manager for their leadership in helping
organize, conduct and complete all the
Shelter reports.
Awesome job Leon and Pat!**

Shelter Reports

<p>School Name: Belleview High School Address: 5000 SE Maricamp Road, Belleview, FL 34420 Phone: 352-475-4120 General Population WiFi Network Name: guest Password: surfup! Radio room number: 224-W-100m-0220</p>  <p>Generator: 3000 gen / 1200 gal. Needs to be verified. Section 101 and 102. This room is a classroom. We set up on a desk and used teacher's chair. There is room for a cot. Antenna connection and red outlet easily reached with 10' cord.</p>  <p>Antenna not located. Using low and high power we were able to hear 5/9 on all channels tested. Channel 6 MERT XKAJG V 146.790 - 600 kHz DV - 5/9 on high and low power Channel 1 MERT XKAJG V 146.790 - 600 kHz DV - 5/9 on high and low power Channel 4 MERT XKAJG V 146.790 - 600 kHz DV - 5/9 on high and low power Channel 11 MERT DV simplex XKAJG V 146.790 - 5/9 on high and low power</p>	<p>School Name: Forest High School Address: 5000 SE Maricamp Road Phone: 352-475-4700 Special Needs WiFi Network Name: guest Password: surfup! Radio room number: 802, room #15 (The radio room was in the 3 maintenance men's offices and they said there wasn't room for 3 people to be in there during a storm, so they moved the radio antenna connection to the other side of wall so radio will have to be set up in "cubicle" area. The MCRP computer screen and keyboard are still in that office.) If radio room is returned to the maintenance men's rooms, it would be hard for female radio operator to share that room with them. No generator on campus. Provided for gen trailer 2000W/ 250 gal. We found the hook up.</p>  <p>If we need to set up in the large room, we would have to run 75' electric cord to inside rm #15 where the red outlet is. Also, the computer screen/keyboard/monitor would have to be moved in large room if we want to use it. We also would need table and chair. We were told this large room is never used for shelter occupants. If that changes, we cannot use this set-up. There are roll-down shutters for this large room's windows. The teacher's lounge is also located off this room that has red outlets and bathrooms. The two photos below show Gary in front of the windows that are in the maintenance men's rooms, and the door to these rooms (just assigned radio room.)</p> 	<p>School Name: Liberty Middle School Address: 4773 SW 95 Street, Ocala, FL 34476 Phone: 352-293-7930 General Population WiFi Network Name: guest Password: surfup! Radio room number: 802, Rm #029</p>  <p>Generator: 3000W gen / 425 gal. Needs to be verified. This room is in the back of the cafeteria and is in a storage closet for cleaning supplies and houses the alarm and electrical cabinets. We found a temporary cart to set up on and a chair. There is just enough room for a cot. Antenna connection easily reached. Red outlet is on opposite wall so 25' cord is more than enough.</p> 	<p>School Name: Lake Weir High School Address: 10551 SE Maricamp Road, Ocala, FL 34472 Phone: 352-475-4820 General Population WiFi Network Name: guest Password: surfup! Radio room number: NEW: 802 Health Room Office</p>  <p>Generator: 3000W gen / 1200 gal. Needs to be verified. This room is just off the cafeteria and contains sound equipment. We found an air cart to set up on and no chair. There is room for a cot. Antenna connection and red outlet easily reached.</p>  <p>Antenna not located. Using low and high power we were able to hear 5/9 on all channels tested. Channel 6 MERT XKAJG V 146.790 - 600 kHz DV - 5/9 on high and low power</p>
<p>School Name: Madison Street Elementary School Address: 401 NW 8th Blvd Phone: 352-475-7250 General Population WiFi Network Name: guest Password: surfup! Radio room number: Building #42, Room #47</p>  <p>No generator on campus. Provided for gen trailer 2000W/ 250 gal. We found the hook up.</p> <p>Unavailable radio room: Small room off the back of cafeteria which is manager's office. Has desk, file cabinet, book case and chair that couldn't be moved out easily. Computer screen and keyboard on wall for MCRP network access. There is MCRP room to set up in. No AC unit. No table or cell phone reception. Cannot get out in hallway outside of the office door because there is an outside door right there and it would be blocked. (Gary is standing in front of office door and outside door.) No door on cafeteria prep area to secure radio person. Cot would have to be located pretty far from radio.</p>  <p>Antenna connection is within reach of 10' cord in kit.</p>	<p>School Name: Saddlewood Elementary School Address: 3700 SW 43 Ct, Ocala, FL 34474 Phone: 352-293-4075 General Population WiFi Network Name: guest Password: surfup! Radio room number: Staff Lounge/ Dining 06-0095 Kitchen break room.</p>  <p>No generator on campus. Supposed to be provided for gen trailer 2000W/ 250 gal. We could NOT find the hook up. This is clean room, long table with chairs, adjoining bathroom. Lots of room for cot and to set up equipment. Antenna connection easily reached. Could NOT find red electrical outlet anywhere. Better bring a couple radio batteries and antennas. No windows.</p> 	<p>School Name: Vanguard High School Address: 7 NW 28 Street, Ocala, FL 34475 Phone: 352-475-4900 General and Pet Shelter WiFi Network Name: guest Password: surfup! Corrected radio room number: Building 5 Room 8 #028 Could not confirm generator capacity. 8000W gen/ 700 gal</p>  <p>Unavailable radio room: Small cramped, cluttered room off the cafeteria. Has table and chair. Computer screen and keyboard on wall for MCRP network access. There is room to set up a cot of other items are moved out. No windows.</p>  <p>Antenna connection within reach of 10' cord in kit.</p>	<p>School Name: Westport High School Address: 3733 SW 80 Ave, Ocala, FL 34481 Phone: 352-293-4000 Special Needs WiFi Network Name: guest Password: surfup! Radio room number: 802, Rm #4245</p>  <p>Generator: 3000 gen/1,100 gal. Needs to be verified. This room is about 1/2 off and off the gymnasium/shelter area. There is a rack for holding PA equipment for the gym (room is electrical storage closet). The floor has debris and mats. Our team found a table and chair to set up on. There is just room for a cot and table. A fan is needed because with the door shut it gets really warm in there. No lock on door. The door needs to be kept shut because another occupant will be right outside in their cot. Antenna connection easily reached. All EG outlets. No windows.</p>  <p>Antenna not located. Using low and high power we were able to hear 5/9 on all channels tested.</p>

Pat Davis created the individual reports on each Shelter tests documenting the results.
Excellent work Pat!

Monthly Meeting – June 18th

MERT wants to thank Bill Gillespie, MERT Assistant Coordinator for leading the June Monthly Meeting. Some of the topics included:

- a review of revisions to the uniform standards recently adopted;
- spouse participation guidelines;
- Shelter inspection/testing results;
- Florida State Shelter status reviews;
- MERT repeater relocation into new communications building at the Sheriff's Office Complex;
- receipt of the new MERT radio equipment supporting the MCC deployments,
- and the arrival of the 2024 Hurricane Season – and its challenging forecast.



Bill Gillespie (KW5BG)
MERT Assistant
Coordinator

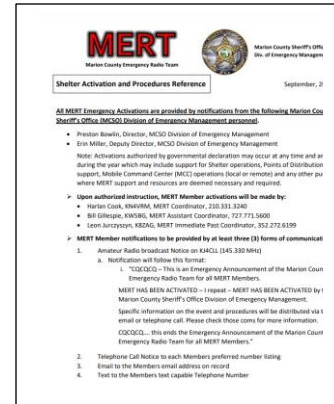
"You do not find the happy life. You make it!" — Camilla Eyring Kimbal

Shelter Activation and Procedures Reference

All Members are encouraged to review the guideline for Shelter Activations located in each Shelter Reference Manual. The document outlines many important and relevant details in successfully operating from a Shelter and supporting the local Shelter Manager assigned to that school.

Learn more at: [KG4NXO.com](https://kg4nxo.com) under the “MERT SHELTER Reference” - “3-Ring Binder Recommendations for Shelter Operators” – “Shelter Activation Procedures (Revised Sept. 2023)” The following link will redirect you...

<https://kg4nxo.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/2023-Revised-Activation-Procedures-and-Recommendations-2023-09.pdf>



Major MERT Upgrades and New Communications Building – Sheriff's Office Complex

Over the past two months, the Marion County Communications Dept has been in the process of upgrading the Sheriff's Office Complex tower and communications building facilities. MERT personnel were invited to participate in this major project which included a replacement of all of the antenna cables on the tower along with the MERT antennas supporting KG4NXO 2 Meter (VHF) and 70 cm (UHF) repeaters with the KG4NXO-10 Winlink Gateway on 145.630 MHz. It also included a complete replacement of the previous communications “hut” with a state-of-the-art new communications building.

This upgrade was the first in over 20 years and was conducted for multiple reasons. First, the radio operations for the County had changed significantly over the past two decades and various antennas and cables were no longer required. The County also needed to add new facilities on the tower to support the current operations. Additionally, the National Weather Service is adding a “Mini-doppler radar” to enhance the weather conditions reporting across Marion County.

As you would expect, projects like this are complex and require multiple groups, agencies and contractors to coordinate the schedules and tasks necessary to complete the activity. MERT wants to thank Patrick Kirkowski, Technology Support Specialist with Marion County for his ongoing support and assistance in seeing Division of Emergency Management equipment supporting MERT activities was supported at every step of the

project. We also extend a huge thanks to Preston Bowlin, Director of the Division of Emergency Management for his significant support and financial commitment in making resources available to replace two antennas (one damaged & one corroded) along with the additional cables and connectors necessary for activation.

MERT is now at the final phase where we can begin moving the radio equipment from the old location into the new communications building. We anticipate having everything moved and reactivated by the first week of July. Training classes will soon be created to document our facilities along with support and circuit documentation resources.



NOAA/NWS “Mini-Doppler” unit will be added to top of tower soon.



Photo of tower before having old antennas and cables removed.



Photo of new antenna cable entry plate showing all four MERT cables. (Notice the huge grounding plate.)



Interior photo of new communications bldg. showing state-of-the-art facilities with the interior lightning protection grid and high-capacity UPS.



Tower has had all old cables and antennas removed. Now ready for all new equipment.



(L-R) Phil Lewis and Harlan Cook review the new ultra-high gain dual-band antenna which will be installed.



(L-R) Bill Gillespie and Phil Lewis putting the new antenna together.

Inventory Update

This year's preparations included transferring spare cables and equipment out of some cardboard boxes and into new larger capacity storage bins having MERT identification.

The inventory identified spare hardware, cables and other resources necessary to backup MERT operations should any failures occur. We also grouped some equipment into a category of "needing retirement". Thanks to all the Members who supported the effort!

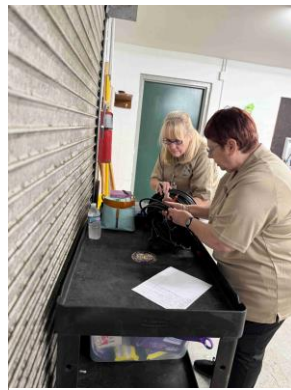
A Special Note of Thanks to Kathy Oxendine who happily photographed all the activities on June 26th. Thank You and Well-Done Kathy!



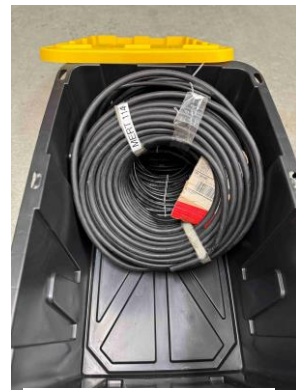
Cindy Sheffield detailing all MERT spare equipment.



(L-R) Hayden Kaufman and Gray Moffett inventory radios and electronic equipment.



(L-R) Dee Seagraves and Cindy Sheffield identifying and labelling every item.



Our new storage containers will better protect MERT equipment and improve inventory control.

PLEASE SPREAD THE WORD ABOUT THE MARION COUNTY EMERGENCY RADIO TEAM (MERT).

WE NEED NEW AND ACTIVE MEMBERS TO FULFILL OUR MISSION IN SUPPORTING ALL THE OPEN SCHOOLS WHENEVER ACTIVATED FOR CITIZENS SHELTER AND SAFETY.

Learn more about MERT at.... KG4NXO.com