

MERT

Marion County Emergency Radio Team



Marion County Sheriff's Office
Division of Emergency Management

COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

October 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 October 19th @ 10:00 am.

All Amateur Radio Operators are Welcomed!

Your **Pen** is as Important as your **Microphone!**



Harlan Cook (KN4VRM)
MERT Coordinator

As emergency communicators (EMCOMM), we have all dedicated a significant amount of time, energy and effort in learning and following the Incident Command System (ICS) protocols. As we know, our certifications for the ICS-100, 200, 700 and 800 courses are important credentials required by the MCSO Division of Emergency Management for MERT membership.

With your membership and willingness to support a school shelter during a hurricane as the last level of communications support, members also learn that documentation is a critical and vital part of our overall responsibilities.

Did you know? During any activation or deployment, all activated operators should spend as much time writing and documenting activities... **as we do talking.** *Really? Why?*

First and foremost, documenting your activities and communications is required by ICS protocols to verify your actions during any declared emergency. This information might be used to verify reimbursement requests by the Division of Emergency Management... but even more importantly, the information may be used to verify what MERT operators have done in support of an emergency situation... like a rescue (as MERT members performed during the 2022 Hurricane Ian event in Ft. Meyers).

"Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts." – Winston Churchill

That documentation supported the creation and verification of a detailed report by the MERT IC to the MCSO EOC IC on duty by 0545 hours that morning.

With the verbal reports from the operators on duty, specific details were collected from the ICS-213, ICS-214 and ICS-309 verifying the timelines, events and details

MERT's life-saving actions and other work were recognized with a **Meritorious Volunteer Unit Award** by Sheriff Billy Woods on March 31, 2023.

Thank you for always completing and signing all documents required by ICS procedures and understanding we never know when they will be used for an important reason. Sign In – Sign Out - and Document!

To all MERT Members... thank you for your enthusiasm and support of our mission...
"When all else fails. Call MERT!"



MERT
Meritorious Volunteer Unit
Award, March 31, 2023

Welcome Cindy Sheffield (K9LRX) – New Documentation Manager

MERT welcomes Cindy Sheffield as its new Documentation Manager. Cindy shares this about herself... "I initially got my HAM license to make myself more useful to the K9 Search and Rescue teams where I was serving as Communication Chief (in Texas).

I did a weekend HAM CRAM class and passed the FCC Technician license but was only called on to use the HAM license once or twice during my 14-year tenure with the various teams. So technically, I'm a real newbie when it comes to talking over the airwaves. I'm looking forward to learning more and communicating with other operators."



Cindy Sheffield, (K9LRX)
Documentation Manager

Since joining MERT a few months ago, Cindy has enthusiastically participated in operational, technical and procedural training events, hurricane preparations and SHREK Kit audits. Her New Member Orientation Guide is quickly being filled too. Cindy also joined in the Hurricane Helene activation as a EOC Trainee who impressed as a quick learner! Thank You Cindy for your support as MERT Documentation Manager!

"To bring about change, you must not be afraid to take the first step. When you change your thoughts, remember to also change your world". – Rosa Parks

Hurricane Helene Activation

As Tropical Storm Helene moved across the eastern Gulf growing into a Category 4 Hurricane, MERT was activated at 8:00 am on Sept 26th supporting the special needs Shelter at West Port High School and the EOC Radio Room. MERT recognizes the following for honoring their membership commitment:



Bill Gillespie
EOC

Bill Sobel
EOC

Gary Neron
Shelter

Pat Davis
Shelter

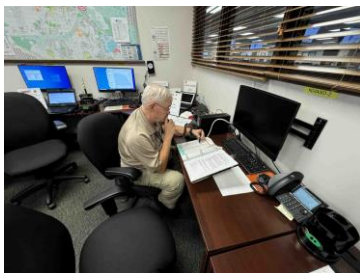
Ray Woody
Shelter Trainee

Cindy Sheffield
EOC Trainee

Not shown: Royce Hagerman, Harlan Cook and Standby Operators Dave Gustafson & Mike Condon.

Few were able to predict the incredible devastation and loss of life Hurricane Helene would cause across Florida, Georgia, the Carolinas, Tennessee and Virginia, especially after the mostly limited impacts it had here in Marion County despite the growth of the Hurricane into a huge monster Cat 4 hurricane. (MERT Note: Pat & Bill Davis were without power, cellphone and Internet for 5 days.)

MERT Operators were deactivated at 10:00 PM (14 hours) but provided EOC support to CERT communities having amateur radio Op's during their deployment on Friday morning. (Thanks to Bill Sobel K1WLS) MERT thanks all members for their excellent support!



(Top L) Bill Gillespie
(Top C) Cindy Sheffield; Bill Gillespie & Royce Hagerman
(Top R) EOC Weather Update
(Lower L) Gary Neron & Bill Sobel
(Lower R) Hayden Kaufman (ARES) and Cindy Sheffield



"Every accomplishment starts with the decision to try. Do what you can, with what you have, where you are". – John F. Kennedy

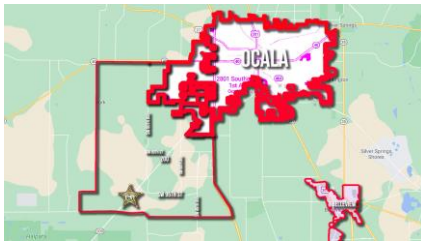
MERT Surprise Visit

During the Thursday, Sept. 26th Activation for Hurricane Helene, Lt. Ryan Robbins visited MERT's Radio Room for the first time in thanking us for what we do in support of Marion County residents.

He shared Preston Bowlin, Director of Emergency Management is vocal about our activities during emergencies and the significant training, readiness and EMCOMM support we provide when called upon. As he is now assigned to the EOC for future Activations, he wanted to personally say Hi! and let us know to call... if he can ever be of assistance to MERT.



**Lt. Ryan Robbins,
Southwest District
Commander**



We sincerely thank him for the visit and sharing his offer of support for our efforts. Harlan Cook, Coordinator and Bill Gillespie, Assistant Coordinator invited him to visit at any time!

(L) Marion County Southwest District has 41,000 residents and covers 78 Sq. mi.

NVIS Go Box Equipment List

A big "Thank You" goes to MERT member Dee Seagraves and new member Jerry Landrum for completing the NVIS ANTENNA GO BOX inventory which was the final task of the project. This antenna resource is designed for rapid deployment ensuring all components are available for setup/operation anywhere MERT is deployed.

MERT		NVIS GO BOX Equipment List		September 14, 2024		
Item	Manufacturer	Model	Serial Number	Description	Quantity	No.
1	Sunnglade	28 inches	na	Collapsible Traffic Cones w/reflective collars (Antenna stake location ground safety markers)	3	One more
2	Beaufore	12 inches	na	Yellow HD Plastic Ground anchoring stakes for antenna lead cables	10	
3	Misc	na	na	Gray, Insulated guy tensioners	8	
4	Misc	1 inch x 100 ft	na	Orange Surveyor Tape (Antenna lead safety markers used 1-100 above ground on antenna support)	1 roll	
5	Decon	IP-54	na	Orange, Weather resistant & waterproof, LMR-400 Coaxial Connector covers, 2 in x 1 in	2	
6	Misc	Velcro straps	na	Black, 1 in x 12 in straps to secure coax cable and antenna lead cables	8	
7	Times Fiber	LMR-400 Coax	na	NVIS antenna jumper cable, 100 ft coaxial cable w/PL-259 male coaxial connectors, each end	1	
8	DK Engineering	12 in SMA cable w/BNC Male & SO-238 connectors	na	BNC Male (NVIS antenna connector) to SO238 Female Jack (NVIS jumper cable) adapter cable using via SMA clip	2	
9	DK Engineering	BNC Male to SO-238	na	Backup adapter for NVIS antenna to NVIS jumper cable	1	
10	DK Engineering	SO-238 female to PL-259 Adapter	na	Backup adapter for NVIS antenna to NVIS coax jumper	1	
11	DK Engineering	N female to N Female adapter	na	Backup adapter for NVIS jumper cable	1	
12	US Army Surplus	AS-2259	na	Duffel bag	1	
13	" " "	AS-2259	na	NVIS Antenna Base Unit	1	
14	" " "	AS-2259	na	NVIS Mast - approx. 2 ft each - 7 pieces	7	
15	" " "	AS-2259	na	NVIS top unit Assembly with antenna elements, rope hoists, etc.	1	
16						
17						

(L) A copy of the completed Equipment List.

(R) Members constructed the NVIS antenna and made a 40 Meter contact within 30-minutes on July 17th.



September 21st Monthly Meeting

Attendee's at MERT's monthly meeting enjoyed several informative speakers.

First up was Sargeant Todd Winkler (W1NKX) of the Sheriff's Office who stopped by and said "Hi!" to fellow hams. Todd is interested in using his license and learning more about the hobby and was invited to join our weekly and monthly meetings whenever time allows.



Sargeant Todd Winkler
W1NKX

Harlan led off sharing a proposal for adding the Forest Tower to MERT's County repeaters along with an overview and recommendation on creating a County-wide, linked multi-repeater network for MERT. The proposal has been submitted to Director Preston Bowlin for review.

MERT welcomed Guest Speaker Earl McDow (K4ZSW) from Gainesville, FL who shared how he became a ham, his new responsibilities as Editor of the "QST NFL" newsletter along with a few of the current activities of the Alachua County ARES team, including the new larger EOC being planned. We sincerely thank Earl (and his son) for joining MERT!

Next, Gray Moffett (KC3DWY) provided Marion County ARES Update on a FEMA Go Kits and the ARES ICS 217 form. All enjoyed his Show and Tell too.

And completing the meeting was an informative update from Bruce Twiss (KI4NFA) on the current activities of the Hospital Team including the 145.270 Repeater at Advent Health Ocala call sign changed to KN4MIV, Jim Burgess is the new Trustee. Funding has been approved for a new radio/antenna connection for Advent Health Belleview ER; HEC was not activated for Tropical Storm DEBBY; WINLINK VHF Gateways – W9CHA-10 & K8ZAG-10 Gateways are permanently off-air.

MERT Expanding MERT's Capabilities to Service to the Marion County Sheriff's Office Division of Emergency Management Marion County Emergency Radio Team September 18, 2024

MERT Funding Request Objective - Ocala Forest Tower
This document is submitted in support of the funding request for expanding the Marion County Emergency Radio Team (MERT) communications coverage area within Marion County, Florida. Specifically, funding will expand MERT's radio coverage into the unincorporated and challenging North-East area of the County supporting essential radio communications during emergencies.

The Funding has a 100% secondary benefit of providing 2 Motor emergency radio communications (EMERCOM) with the radio operators supporting these services at the Palm Bay, Flagler and Volusia County Emergency Operations Centers (EOCs).

Duration/Amount
MERT's request of August 15, 2024 seeks funding totaling approximately \$ 7,738.34 (plus shipping for equipment/delivery and disposal) and travel (air) to replace a current antenna on the Forest Tower.

History of MERT
The Marion County Emergency Radio Team (MERT) was created and funded in 2004 after a series of hurricanes caused significant and wide-spread damage across Marion County which led to the creation of MERT. MERT's operations are critical to the health, safety and welfare of all county residents. The MERT's operations since then have provided numerous and meaningful documented actions during county emergency activations supporting the Division of Emergency Management including the following MERT Incident Report during Hurricane Idalia.

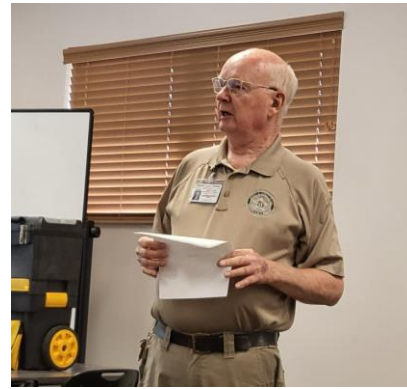
The funding request will build on that history and allow MERT to grow its capabilities in service to the Division of Emergency Management and the residents of Marion County.

Federal Authority
FCC regulations permit radio operators to assist the public by communicating with non-emergency entities (i.e., Homeland Security, FEMA, the National Weather Service, military and civil authorities) during emergencies and disasters, and when specifically authorized by the FCC and Federal Civil Authority (Emergency Management) organizations for the area served. Please refer to:
47 CFR 97.115(a)(2) – Essential communication needs and to facilitate relief actions;
47 CFR 97.115(a)(3) – MERT member FCC regulated service;
47 CFR 97.407(a)(3) – Public safety or national defense or security.



(L) The MERT Linked-Repeater Proposal was shared (C) A full house! (R) Earl McDow (K4ZSW) special presentation.

"The secret of getting ahead... is getting started." – Mark Twain



(L) Gray Moffett presenting information on FEMA “Go Kit” recommendations. (R) Bruce Twiss sharing several updates on Hospital Emergency Team activities.



**Preston Bowlin,
Director of Emergency
Management**

MERT Appreciation Visit

During the Wednesday, September 11th “Check In” meeting, Preston Bowlin, Director of Emergency Management visited with members in thanking them for all MERT does by staying ready and prepared for supporting the Shelters with MERT Radio Operators!

We thank Preston and the entire Emergency Management Team for their support!

Weekly “Check In” Meeting Photos

September “Check In’s” were fun and packed with many different classes and updates from many Members. Here’s some of the photos from the meetings. Join us anytime!

