

MERT

Marion County Emergency Radio Team



Marion County Sheriff's Office
Division of Emergency Management

COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

June 2025

MERT's primary role is to support all open Evacuation Shelters throughout Marion County (FL) during declared Emergency events. We also support the Emergency Operations Center Incident Commander, staff and other EMCOMM groups (CERT, HEC, ARES) with voice, image & data communications locally, statewide and across the United States.

"Call MERT... When all else fails!"

Next Bimonthly Meeting

July 19th, 10:00 am at the
EOC

All Amateur Radio Operators
are Welcomed!

Meetings conducted in Jan,
March, May, July, Sept. and Nov.

Wow. It's June Already!



Harlan Cook (KN4VRM)
MERT Coordinator

As we reach the halfway mark of the year, it's a great time to reflect on our accomplishments so far - along with our goals for the next 6-months. As Steve Jobs was quoted... "The only way to do great work is to love what you do." So... to that motivating quote, it's also important to remind ourselves of the power of TEAMWORK. When many can come together in doing GOOD along with enjoying the activity with friends, our efforts become more than just some "volunteer" time. It truly becomes a source of fulfillment and happiness.

Now that we find ourselves halfway through the year, it can be tempting to slow down and wait for a fresh start. However, successful people and organizations know that consistency is a key to success. That's why MERT events continue focusing on the skills we need during any activation, along with increasing our knowledge on the details of amateur radio and the EMCOMM procedures we follow. Our focus on HF communications this year is one example.

We all are keenly aware that making progress on any activity takes time, and sometimes it may feel like you're not moving fast enough. For me, I often have to remind myself... as long as I keep going, I'm making progress. As the MERT Coordinator, I am deeply indebted to each members participation and owe you a debt of gratitude for your support. I am also extremely thankful for your assistance in helping lead MERT as the responsibilities can be overwhelming at times. To all, I am very grateful for your help and offer my heartfelt thanks.

HR Cook

"Life's most persistent and urgent question is, what are you doing for others?" - Martin Luther King, Jr.

More Great News - Repeater KG4NXO has been Upgraded!



Phil Lewis (WB4EVV)
D-Star Repeater
Manager

In the last newsletter, we shared news the KK4DFC repeater had been upgraded after a major effort and much time. In this newsletter, we have more great news from Phil Lewis (D-Star Repeater Manager) sharing his success in upgrading our second D-Star repeater for KG4NXO. While a few “tweaks” are still necessary, all members are encouraged to share a personal “Thank You!” to Phil when you see him on these major accomplishments.

As background, MERT has been using the first generation Icom D-Star repeaters for nearly 20-years. In addition, these units have used 10-year old PCs as the operating software program machines. Needless to say, MERT was very pleased on their quality for all these years but it was time to replace them with new third generation models. The new repeaters have improved specifications, features and options available making them even more valuable for MERT’s future support to the Division of Emergency Management. We know they will be more reliable too!

The KK4DFC repeater (146.790 MHz) is the primary MERT radio dedicated to supporting all shelter operations throughout Marion County and is located at the Baseline Transfer Station with the antenna at 300 feet AGL. The KG4NXO repeater (145.170 MHz) is the backup unit and is located on the Marion County Sheriff’s property with the antenna at 170 feet AGL. Completing these replacements are major reliability upgrades for MERT’s EMCOMM operations. (Note: Thanks to Jim Lowe (AC4JL) for his help racking/cabling the new units.)



New KK4DFC repeater and
PC installed at Baseline.



New hurricane-rated
Tower supporting
OCF type HF antenna

New EOC Tower Update

The new 30 ft high, hurricane rated lift tower supporting the Off-Center Fed (OCF) antenna at the EOC replaces a telescoping pole which had seen “better days”. The new tower uses a pulley system allowing access to the antenna balun should maintenance or replacements be required. It also has the ability for MERT to add additional HF antennas in the future. The tower/antenna/paracord system will be completed soon when the additional “flagpole rings” holding the cables in place are delivered.



Buckmaster OCF antenna
for HF radio operations
on bands 80/75-40-20-
17-12-10 & 6 Meters

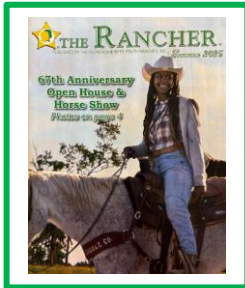
MERT Preparations - Sheriff's Laptops

During a recent Wednesday "Check In" meeting, members took on several projects preparing for the start of this year's hurricane season. One new resource was the ability to check out new Division of Emergency Management laptops for every event. MERT is very thankful for this ability as it is a major tool in supporting our Winlink digital communications capabilities over our radios as part of our EMCOMM resources at the shelters. This year, the preparations included charging and completing Microsoft OS updates... which lasted nearly 4-hours on some units. Thanks to Cindy and Ray for the great teamwork!



(L-R) Cindy Sheffield, MERT Documentation Manager (K9LRX) and Ray Sherwood (WA9MID) show their teamwork completing numerous software and firmware updates on the new laptops.

Sheriff's Ranch



A few years ago, I joined the Florida Sheriff's Association to learn more about all of the activities occurring across our state which includes emergency management events. One benefit I especially enjoy are the updates and articles on the Sheriffs Youth Ranches who are credited with helping more than 186,000 children and families in Florida find a better life. I will share my copy and place it near the "reading area" next to the roster for all to enjoy.

MERT Preparations – SHREK Equipment Audits



Another annual event preparing for the hurricane season is the Shelter Radio Emergency Kit (SHREK) audit. This activity is another key step in verifying each kit has all equipment available and has been fully tested for operations. This year, MERT added two adapters making the kit capable of performing backup EMCOMM using the assigned HT radio should the primary radio (Icom ID-880H) fail.



Training included a class on "Resolving MERT Communications Failures at Shelters" identifying multiple steps in testing and restoring shelter communications useful for the shelter operators.

(Top - Ray Woody, Shelter Manager (WB6FKJ) and Gary Neron (KS4TSX) move the SHREK containers into the classroom for audits.



MERT Preparations – West Marion County Field Exercise

Another part of our annual preparations includes conducting field exercises testing our equipment along with getting on the air! Our latest exercise was from the far western portion of Marion County (21 miles West of the EOC and $\frac{3}{4}$ mile from the County line) in the Rainbow Lakes Estates community.

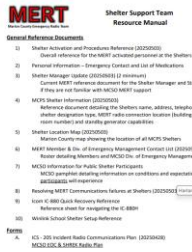
Member Royce Hagerman (KD7SNN) hosted our Field Day event where members used MERT hardware, SHREK radio kits along with their personal systems testing communications over multiple bands. A Field Exercise report detailed the results along with documenting procedural and system improvements for future exercises. It was a fun event for all. Our thanks to Royce for hosting MERT at his home!

MERT West Marion County Field Exercise 2025 04 09

Channel	Frequency	Mode	Power	Bandwidth	Modulation	Notes
1	146.520	FM	5W	12.5K	FM	Control Channel
2	146.530	FM	5W	12.5K	FM	Control Channel
3	146.540	FM	5W	12.5K	FM	Control Channel
4	146.550	FM	5W	12.5K	FM	Control Channel
5	146.560	FM	5W	12.5K	FM	Control Channel
6	146.570	FM	5W	12.5K	FM	Control Channel
7	146.580	FM	5W	12.5K	FM	Control Channel
8	146.590	FM	5W	12.5K	FM	Control Channel
9	146.600	FM	5W	12.5K	FM	Control Channel
10	146.610	FM	5W	12.5K	FM	Control Channel
11	146.620	FM	5W	12.5K	FM	Control Channel
12	146.630	FM	5W	12.5K	FM	Control Channel
13	146.640	FM	5W	12.5K	FM	Control Channel
14	146.650	FM	5W	12.5K	FM	Control Channel
15	146.660	FM	5W	12.5K	FM	Control Channel
16	146.670	FM	5W	12.5K	FM	Control Channel
17	146.680	FM	5W	12.5K	FM	Control Channel
18	146.690	FM	5W	12.5K	FM	Control Channel
19	146.700	FM	5W	12.5K	FM	Control Channel
20	146.710	FM	5W	12.5K	FM	Control Channel
21	146.720	FM	5W	12.5K	FM	Control Channel
22	146.730	FM	5W	12.5K	FM	Control Channel

Channel 1-22 are 146.520-146.730 MHz. Channel 23-24 are 146.740-146.750 MHz. Channel 25-26 are 146.760-146.770 MHz. Channel 27-28 are 146.780-146.790 MHz. Channel 29-30 are 146.800-146.810 MHz. Channel 31-32 are 146.820-146.830 MHz. Channel 33-34 are 146.840-146.850 MHz. Channel 35-36 are 146.860-146.870 MHz. Channel 37-38 are 146.880-146.890 MHz. Channel 39-40 are 146.900-146.910 MHz. Channel 41-42 are 146.920-146.930 MHz. Channel 43-44 are 146.940-146.950 MHz. Channel 45-46 are 146.960-146.970 MHz. Channel 47-48 are 146.980-146.990 MHz. Channel 49-50 are 147.000-147.010 MHz. Channel 51-52 are 147.020-147.030 MHz. Channel 53-54 are 147.040-147.050 MHz. Channel 55-56 are 147.060-147.070 MHz. Channel 57-58 are 147.080-147.090 MHz. Channel 59-60 are 147.100-147.110 MHz. Channel 61-62 are 147.120-147.130 MHz. Channel 63-64 are 147.140-147.150 MHz. Channel 65-66 are 147.160-147.170 MHz. Channel 67-68 are 147.180-147.190 MHz. Channel 69-70 are 147.200-147.210 MHz. 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MERT Preparations - Shelter Activity Update



Shelter Manager, Ray Woody (WB6FKJ) extends his thanks to everyone for their support in completing the major updates and revisions to the multiple Shelter Operator documents in addition to input on the new Shelter Reference Manual he created.



**Ray Woody
(WB6FKJ), Shelter
Manager**

Both resources now provide updated and detailed information for the Shelter Operators (Manual 1) as well as a MERT Leaders information resource (Manual 2) documenting each shelters specific details.

[illegible]

Additionally, Ray created a thorough Annual Testing Guide leading members on the step-by-step operational testing process confirming the condition and readiness of every Shelter before the start of the hurricane season.

Please thank Ray for his significant time and skill in tackling this project in updating our overall Shelter Operations!

MERT Preparations – SHREK Equipment Tests

Another annual activity is testing every SHREK radio confirming their operational readiness. Thanks to all who joined in and completed the testing.



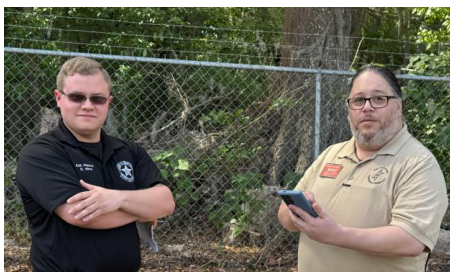
Ray Woody, Shelter Mgr. providing an update on upcoming activities



**Bruce Twiss and Royce Hagerman
setting up a SHREK radio test**



**Jim Lowe and Phil Lewis
on the air conducting tests**



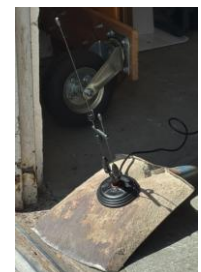
Emergency Management Planner
Nathan Hime & Hayden Kauffman (ARES)



**Doug Bowser and
Nick Kiddey**



**Jerry Landrum and
Shelter Mgr. Ray Woody**



**Test antenna with
unique ground plane**

"Volunteering is an act of heroism on a grand scale. And it matters profoundly." - Sheryl Sandberg

MERT Preparations – Radio Quality

MERT's Mission is to provide the Division of Emergency Management a **last line of emergency communications** (EMCOMM) locally, regionally and nationally via its licensed and trained volunteers using radio transmissions.

Local communications are supported by transmissions at 70 cm and 2 Meter bands (VHF and UHF frequencies). These are referred to as "line of sight" radio communications and are limited to County operations. Long-distance communications are generally supported by High Frequency (HF) radio operations using "ground wave" propagation on frequency bands from 6 Meters to 80 Meters supporting national and international communication distances. Both systems are critical elements of MERT's overall capabilities in maintaining reliable emergency contacts with other County EOC's, the State EOC in Tallahassee and with multiple Federal government agencies via our SHARES license.

Part of MERT's annual preparations includes verifying all our radio and antenna operations are working at peak quality (**what we can control**). Additionally, reviewing the Space Weather Solar Cycle for hints on what we might experience (**what we can't control**) is also informative to learn. Combined together, **both elements** affect our radio communications capabilities when needed.

2025 Forecast – NOAA reports the earth will be at the "Solar Max" level with sporadic events likely occurring with **reduced quality or even complete radio blackouts at times**.



This graph details the current high solar activity levels from the sun which can reduce radio transmission quality and distance. (NOAA Space Weather Prediction



A Special "Thank You"

A sincere thanks to Bill Gillespie for leading MERT during Harlan Cook's absence. MERT is extremely fortunate to have such an experienced leader and very knowledgeable AUXCOMM trained amateur radio operator as its Deputy Coordinator.

Thank you, Bill!