

MERT

Marion County Emergency Radio Team



Marion County Sheriff's Office
Division of Emergency Management

COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

July 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.

Small Steps lead to BIG STEPS!



Harlan Cook (KN4VRM)
MERT Coordinator

Since MERT was created in 2004 by the Marion County Sheriff's Office Division of Emergency Management, MERT's leaders and members have worked together with the Sheriff's staff in developing an organization focused on the mission of providing reliable emergency communications (EMCOMM) service primarily at the evacuation shelters and the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) during hurricane activations.

Those early years were focused on the significant work of adding the basic hardware and systems of a robust amateur radio communications system while creating the mobile systems (Go Kits) packaged for rapid deployments to the shelters. As we know, it is not easy building something from nothing. It takes guts, grit, and a whole lot of vision. Building something from the ground up means wearing ten hats at once, solving problems as they come (and sometimes before they even show up), and constantly pushing forward even when the road gets bumpy (like when COVID hit). I, and all our current members, have a tremendous respect for MERT's past leaders and members who accomplished so much!

But, after twenty years, radio and repeater electronics, communications hardware and basic systems get old, worn out and break (or struck by lightning)... and require significant attention. As a result, MERT has embarked on a major effort in addressing these challenges. I offer we have made remarkable strides in strengthening our communications infrastructure to better serve the Marion County Division of Emergency Management and its emergency

"Volunteers don't get paid, not because they're worthless, but because they're priceless." — Sherry Anderson

response partners over the last four-years. With a steadfast commitment to resilience, quality and innovation, we've implemented significant upgrades and system enhancements across our entire network while challenging ourselves to raise our personal skills and knowledge about current governmental procedures, new challenges not dreamed about 20-years ago (cyber-attacks) and the ever-expanding EMCOMM service to our served agency.

From the replacement of our aging repeaters to the full-scale rebuild of the EOC tower, every project reflects our focus on durability, reliability and insuring robust EMCOMM coverage locally, state-wide and across the U.S. We're also preparing to launch a new Ocala National Forest repeater, which will expand our reach into previously unserved county areas in the NE and East. Our recent move of MERT's radio systems to a state-of-the-art communications hut at the Sheriff's Complex was another step forward - ensuring better coverage, long-term reliability and easier access for maintenance. Additionally, we moved our power connection onto the expanded UPS unit at the Marion Transfer site in further safeguarding our systems with robust power continuity, while at the EOC we have a hurricane rated lift-tower supporting our OCF HF antenna which is designed to allow 24x7 access for repairs or replacements.

Working together with multiple Marion County agencies, these upgrades across multiple systems mark a new chapter for MERT, one built on reliability, responsiveness, and readiness for whatever comes next. We have also rededicated our effort in raising our own personal skills and knowledge in our drive for excellence. We do not know what our future assignments may be, but we know this... MERT is prepared to tackle whatever assignment it is given. Because we are ready! Our moto is our guide.... **"When all else fails. Call MERT!"**

Thank you, members, for your participation and support!

AR Cook

2025 Hurricane Preparations

- ❖ Preparations for this year's hurricane season are nearing completion. They have included:
 - ✓ Significant revisions to the Shelter Manual and adding the new Shelter Support Team Resource Manual. MERT has never been better prepared in having all the information it needs to be as prepared and effective as possible at every shelter location!
- A huge Thank You to **Ray Woody (WB6FKJ), Shelter Manager** for his major commitment to collect, update, catalog and publish this new comprehensive resource for MERT.

SHELTER SUPPORT TEAM RESOURCE MANUAL	SHELTER INFORMATION Shelter Activation and Procedures Reference Personal Information - Emergency Contact and Info Shelter Manager Update MCPD Shelter Information Shelter Location Map MCPD Information Transfer for Shelter Participant
	MERT / EOC CONTACT LIST MERT Member & Div. of Emergency Management Contact List
	RESOLVING COMMUNICATION ISSUES Resolving MERT Communication Failures at Shelter EO-8584 Packet Description Overview of the ICOM ID-858H
	WINLINK WINLINK School Shelter Setup
	FORMS ICD-205 Incident Radio Communication Plan ICD-213 General Message ICD-214 Activity Log ICD-300 Communications Log ICD-301A Equipment Log MERT Shelter Hot Wash

❖ Shelter repairs:

- We are scheduled to help the MCPS staff make repairs to the radio cable their staff moved at Forest High School. A meeting is scheduled at the school on July 2nd to help them find the cable problem(s). A report on our visit and the results will be included in next month's newsletter.



❖ Upgrading radio coverage for Marion County

- MERT has done an awesome job providing and supporting local 2 Meter and 70 cm radio coverage across most of Marion County with its D-Star repeater upgrades and FM repeater for KJ4CLL. However, there is always room for improvements and enhancements.
- With the future addition of the Forest Tower repeater, radio coverage will now be possible in the NE and Eastern portions of Marion County, including the Ocala National Forest.
- The new repeater should also open a line of communications into Flagler and Volusia Counties.



Another huge Thank You to **Phil Lewis (WB4EVV), D-Star Manager** for his major commitment to test, configure and program the new D-Star repeaters for MERT along with supporting this new site repeater move.

❖ High Frequency (HF) Antenna Options

- While MERT will be expanding its County EMCOMM capabilities (see above), an analysis has determined our HF resources are very limited and do not have "backup" resources should failure(s) occur.
 - We must address this resource gap and find other antenna designs and capabilities to better "harden" our operations against single or multiple antenna failures.
 - Another opportunity includes a fresh look at our NVIS capability.
 - We also need to add HF antenna resources for SHARES operations providing MERT direct communications with multiple agencies and departments of the U.S. government.



❖ SHARES Operations

- MERT has barely "scratched the surface" in adding this important HF EMCOMM resource to our radio operations and training activities.
- Discussions have centered on where we are at and where we must grow our knowledge, training and future capabilities using this license.
- We also need to add antennas for full-time SHARES radio messaging information transmitted hourly to all stations.



**MERT's new
SHARES station!**

MERT's members have accomplished much in 2025... **but**, more lies ahead of us. I know we can address these challenges and achieve great results with everyone's participation.

MERT Guest Update



**(L-R) Kathy Dugan, "352 Today"
Editor-in-Chief and Preston Bowlin,
Director of Emergency Management.**

On June 25th, Preston Bowlin - Director of Emergency Management provided a tour of the Sheriff's facilities to Kathy Dugan, Editor-in-Chief of "**352 Today**", a part of the North Central Florida Media group. The tour included a stop at the MERT Radio Room where Coordinator Harlan Cook (KN4VRM) provided a brief overview of the responsibilities and operations in service to the Division of Emergency Management. Joining in the discussion was ARES Coordinator Hayden Kauffman.

More information about "352 Today" at: 352today.com

Great Teamwork!

Some delayed projects were completed in June thanks to several members leadership and team participation.

- Cindy Sheffield (K9LRX) led a team in completing the Surplus Equipment Inventory audit in moving some old unused hardware to the recycle bin.
- Royce Hagerman (KG7SNN) led another team who tackled the creation of the new inventory list for MCC GO KITS #1 and #2. Future efforts will focus on finalizing the transport cases which will store the radios and hardware for these new MERT GO KITS.

Cindy and Royce – Thank You for the leadership in completing both these projects!


MERT Damaged, Non-repairable, Unusable, End-of-Life Surplus Radio Equipment June 25, 2025

Inventory of Damaged/Unusable Equipment

The following equipment damaged, non-repairable, unusable and end of life (EOL) equipment reported to MERT by the MERT members. This equipment is being reported to MERT for the purpose of being disposed of at the MERT facility. It is not to be used for any other purpose. The equipment is being reported to MERT for the purpose of being disposed of at the MERT facility. It is not to be used for any other purpose.

Item #	Quantity	Model	Serial #	Description of equipment (make, model, and serial number)	Disposition
1	1	Kenwood	1000000000	Kenwood TH-D7A	Disposal
2	1	Kenwood	1000000000	Kenwood TH-D7A	Disposal
3	1	Kenwood	1000000000	Kenwood TH-D7A	Disposal
4	1	Kenwood	1000000000	Kenwood TH-D7A	Disposal
5	1	Kenwood	1000000000	Kenwood TH-D7A	Disposal
6	1	Kenwood	1000000000	Kenwood TH-D7A	Disposal
7	1	Kenwood	1000000000	Kenwood TH-D7A	Disposal
8	1	Kenwood	1000000000	Kenwood TH-D7A	Disposal
9	1	Kenwood	1000000000	Kenwood TH-D7A	Disposal
10	1	Kenwood	1000000000	Kenwood TH-D7A	Disposal
11	1	Kenwood	1000000000	Kenwood TH-D7A	Disposal
12	1	Kenwood	1000000000	Kenwood TH-D7A	Disposal
13	1	Kenwood	1000000000	Kenwood TH-D7A	Disposal
14	1	Kenwood	1000000000	Kenwood TH-D7A	Disposal
15	1	Kenwood	1000000000	Kenwood TH-D7A	Disposal
16	1	Kenwood	1000000000	Kenwood TH-D7A	Disposal
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98	1	Kenwood	1000000000	Kenwood TH-D7A	Disposal
99	1	Kenwood	1000000000	Kenwood TH-D7A	Disposal
100	1	Kenwood	1000000000	Kenwood TH-D7A	Disposal

**(L-R) MERT Surplus Inventory report and the MCC
GO KIT #1 & #2 Equipment List**

		MCC Go Kit #1 & #2 Equipment List			June 25, 2025	
Item	Qty	Model	Serial #	Description	Disposition	Notes
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MERT Leadership Update – July 5th to 17th

With Coordinator Harlan Cook and Bill Gillespie out of state beginning July 5th, Ray Woody (WB6FKJ) has accepted responsibility for being the acting Coordinator on Duty. Supporting Ray as Deputy Coordinators will be Cindy Sheffield (K9LRX) and Nick Kiddey (W4NFK). If any questions arise, they can be contacted at:

Ray Woody 770-328-5459 Cindy Sheffield 979-574-7725 Nick Kiddey 256-653-1290

Hello!

MERT members say **Hi!** and invite everyone to attend the Wednesday “Check In” meetings. We’ve covered the new HT radio plan documented on the updated ICS-205, a “Think Tank” session on future plans for

SHARES operations, and a class on how to configure your WINLINK account to receive notifications on your primary email address when messages are received. All **MERT, CERT, ARES, HEC and amateur radio operators** are welcomed to attend.



MERT members and friends at the meeting on June 18th say Hi!



Preston Bowlin,
Director Division of
Emergency
Management

Director Preston Bowlin Update

On June 25th, Preston Bowlin, Director of the Division of Emergency Management joined the Wednesday “Check In” meeting with updates on multiple topics of interest for members. We appreciate his time with us and in taking multiple questions from members.

We sincerely thank Director Bowlin for his unwavering support along with providing the financial resources on multiple equipment upgrades completed over the last four-years for MERT’s systems. Those resources have upgraded and renewed multiple elements improving our reliability for years to come. Thank You Director Bowlin!

(L) Director Preston Bowlin attends the June 25th “Check In” meeting and provides updates on relevant topics important to MERT activities.



Till we Meet Again...



(L-R) Gary Neron (KS4TSX) and
Ray Woody (WB6FKJ).

MERT sends its very best wishes to Gary Neron (KS4TSX) who is leaving after several years of service. Gary was a “GO TO” for any shelter activation during declared emergencies, especially at the Ft. McCoy school. Additionally, he was always quick to accept a project or help out whenever and where ever needed.

Gary, thank you for your service, your support and especially your leadership. You will be missed good friend!

Ps – In his resignation letter, Gary wrote... “I have been privileged to be part of an organization comprised of such highly knowledgeable, skilled, dedicated and helpful people. It was an honor to serve alongside all of you...” ***Gary, the honor was ours!***

For more information of the Marion County Emergency Radio Team (MERT), visit:

KG4NXO.com