

# MERT

Marion County Emergency Radio Team



Marion County Sheriff's Office  
Division of Emergency Management

## **COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE**

**March 2026**

**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, all cities in the county and other EMCOMM groups (CERT, HEC, ARES & MBA) with voice, image & data communications locally, statewide and across the United States.**

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

### **Next Bimonthly Meeting**

**Saturday, March 21st,**  
**10:00 am at the EOC**

**All are Welcomed!**

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

### **Hello Spring!**



**Harlan Cook (KN4VRM)**  
**MERT Coordinator**

I was born in a time we got to enjoy the entertainment skills of a wonderful comedian named Shelly Winters. She once said... "It was so cold I almost got married." Well, for me, that happened 47-years ago so I now remember winters... as something to avoid. (Really – just kidding honey!)

I can't express how happy I am that Spring is here. As the sun moves higher in the sky and the first hints of warmer weather settles in, I'm reminded how this season has always symbolized renewal. It seems natural to get some sun on the face, shake off the slower pace of winter, and reconnect with our individual routines keeping us moving forward.

For MERT, Spring is much more than a change in Florida's weather—it's a reminder of why we train, why we check in, and why our mission matters. Many of our members stay active through meetings and our Thursday evening radio training Nets, keeping their radios exercised and their operator skills fresh.

But I also know that life pulls each of us in many directions. If you haven't keyed the mike in a while, or if your radio hasn't been powered on since last season, this is the perfect moment to rejoin the rhythm! A few minutes on the training Net each week strengthens your confidence, verifies your radio equipment, and reinforces the skills learned as licensed radio operators.

*"When we strive to become better than we are, everything around us becomes better too." - Paulo Coelho*

Of course, later this year, our mission becomes real when the Marion County Division of Emergency Management may activate us ahead of an approaching hurricane. When we staff a school shelter, we are often the calmest voice in the room—the ones who maintain communication when the outside world feels uncertain to most. That level of readiness doesn't happen by accident. It grows from the many small steps we have done together to train and prepare - which includes attending a meeting, checking in on the training Nets, reviewing your home and personal Go Kits, or simply reconnecting with fellow volunteers.

Spring gives us a chance to renew those habits. To tune up not just our radios, but our sense of purpose. To remember that every voice at a shelter and on the air strengthens our team and our mission that will stand together when later this year, winds may rise to levels that humans cannot tolerate alone.

Each Spring is when we reverify all the school shelter antenna and cable systems are still in good quality. If you haven't contacted Deputy Coordinator Ray Woody to help out, please do as soon as possible as he is finalizing the schedules for Tuesday and Wednesday, March 17th and 18<sup>th</sup>.

And speaking of strengthening our skills, I'm excited to share that on April 18th, MERT will renew [MERT 22](#), our Special Event Station focused on expanding our HF (high frequency) capabilities. This will be a hands-on opportunity to practice long-distance communication, experiment with antennas, and build confidence on the bands that we are responsible to use in addition to our local auxiliary communications (AUXCOMM) on 2-Meters and 70-cm's.

If you are an experienced HF operator, please join us and Elmer our members learning this new skill. If you have never been on the HF bands, please join us and step into a whole new universe of amateur radio that opens the WORLD to enjoy! Everyone's participation (members and guests) will result in growing our individual and collective skills. It will also strengthen bonds by helping each other; building relationships fostering trust and connection; and enhancing personal well-being by having good times with good people.

As Spring unfolds, I hope you'll take this new season as an invitation—renew your connection, refresh your skills, and rejoin the mission that makes MERT such a vital part of Marion County's emergency preparedness in service to all Marion County residents.

**Your presence matters. Your skills matter. Your voice matters.** And together, we make MERT and Marion County stronger. With sincere appreciation,



Harlan Cook  
MERT Coordinator

## From the Deputy Coordinator

### ***MY FIRST SIX MONTHS WITH MY FIRST HANDY TALKIE***

About six months ago, I was pleasantly surprised when I received a very nice gift: a used but like-new Kenwood TH-D72 Dual-Band Handy Talkie.

This is the very first HT that I can call my own. Other than my very limited experience with the MERT Baofeng's, I had never touched an HT before. I am one of those ham types that grew up with HF, back in the days of large transceivers filled with glowing vacuum tubes and plenty of ergonomic knobs and switches on the face panel to control things. Now I found myself trying to learn how to use a feature-rich HT filled with tiny multi-function buttons with my "ten left thumbs".

After six months, I'm still not a savvy user yet, but I have made a lot of progress. Initially, I decided to forego the Kenwood Operating Manual (boring, tedious and overwhelming) and resort to YouTube videos (my YouTube search inquiry was "DH-72 tutorials for dummies"). This turned out to be a good way to get started, as I discovered a number of video channels created by other TH-D72 users and experienced HT hams demonstrating practical uses and features in action. I learned how to set up basic functions like frequency selection, power adjustments, and storing channels (manually).



**Kenwood  
TH-D72**

Other helpful tools are the "Quick Start Guides" that I found online, which are akin to cheat sheets that highlight the basic operations needed to help beginners get started right away. Just playing around with the various buttons and functions is educational.

After a few weeks, I was eager to start using the HT in a real-world scenario. Around that time, Phil Lewis (W4EUV) was looking for volunteers to provide comm. support for our community 5K charity race held on Halloween morning. I'm happy to report that the radio and its operator both worked fine on race day. I'm looking forward to using the HT next month during our school Shelter Radio Testing Audits, as well as our field exercises this spring.

Although I am much more comfortable now with the TH-D72, I've only scratched the surface with becoming familiar with and using its many features. It has Automatic Packet Reporting System (APRS), built-in GPS, Cross-Band Repeater capability, advanced scanning functions, among others. For an HT whose technology is now over 15- years old, it remains a very powerful and versatile device, and one that will keep me in learning mode for quite some time.

Ray Woody, WB6FKJ  
MERT Deputy Coordinator



**Ray Woody (WB6FKJ)  
Deputy Coordinator**

*"What we have done for ourselves alone dies with us; what we have done for others and the world remains and is immortal." - Albert Pike*

## Annual Shelter Tests Announced

Ray Woody announced details of the annual school shelter tests focused on 14 sites being tested on March 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> (Tuesday and Wednesday).

The tests are conducted each year in confirming the quality of the antenna and cable systems along with inventorying the radio operator site resources needed should MERT's Operators be deployed to that school facility.

This years' tests will include voice & digital communications from each location over multiple D-Star and open FM repeaters along with MERT's Winlink Gateways. Members are encouraged to participate and help test locations near your residence to become familiar with them should the school be activated. Training classes are scheduled for March 3<sup>rd</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup>.

Please contact Ray Woody to sign up for the testing schedule.

We thank **Ms. Logan Stamp**, Div. of Emergency Management Coordinator for her assistance in securing MCPS support for this year's testing exercise.

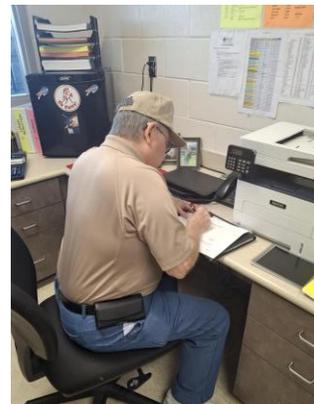
## 2025 Testing Photos



Ray Woody & Royce Hagerman at a Shelter



Royce Hagerman testing comm's using his HT.



Phil Lewis completing the testing form with results.



Example of how weather can impact MERT radio systems.

**MERT 22 Coming Soon!** Mark your calendar - **April 18<sup>th</sup> – Saturday – 8:00 am till 2:00 PM**



**Special Event** Chairman Bill Sobel (K1WLS) along with Cindy Sheffield (K9LRX) and Nick Kiddey (W4NFK) are finalizing plans for this year's... **"MERT 22"** event.

It will be a fun event for everyone to **"get on the air"** and enjoy making contacts all across the U.S. and world.

All hams are invited to participate.

*"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."* – Mahatma Gandhi

## Deployment Recognition Certificates

During the February 25th “Check In” meeting, two members were recognized for their extended deployments of at least **24-hours of continuous duty** at a Shelter or the EOC when assigned during an emergency activation. We celebrate both members who fulfilled the primary mission for MERT service!



Bill Sobel, K1WLS receives his Deployment Ribbon for 24-hours of continuous duty at the EOC or Shelters.

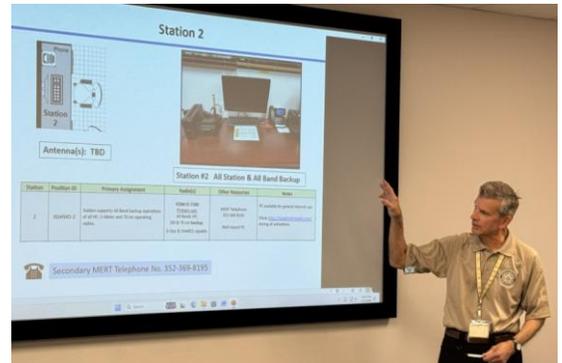


Kim Shulby, KM4JMZ receives her Deployment Ribbon for 24-hours of continuous duty at the Dunnellon Shelter.

## Wednesday “Check In” Updates - February



Mark Weible discusses “Meshtastek” technology.



Deputy Coordinator Ray Woody presents an excellent overview of the EOC Radio room modifications.



HEC Liaison Bruce Twiss shares details on the antenna “Hamstick’s” donated to MERT.

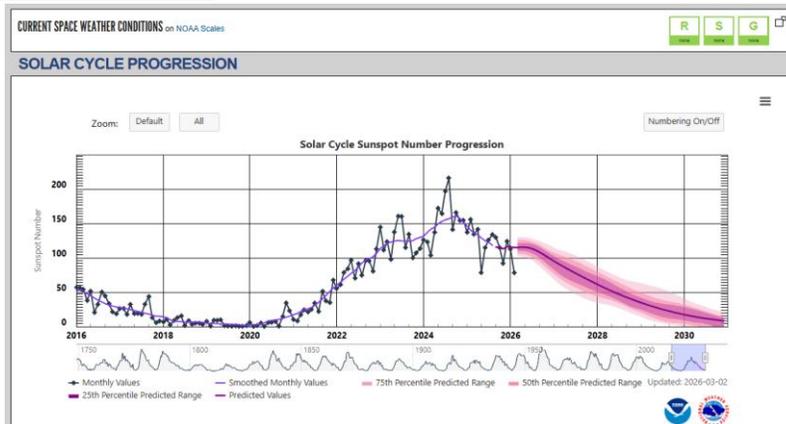


Bill Sobel, Trustee presents an overview of the [MERT 22](#) Special Event scheduled for April 18<sup>th</sup> (Saturday) 8 am – 2 PM

*“Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.” – Arthur Ashe*

## Solar Cycle Update – HF Bands Quality Forecast

Understanding solar cycle conditions is important for MERT because the Sun directly controls how well our radios work – especially on HF bands, and knowing what the ionosphere is doing helps all operators make smarter and more reliable communication decisions when it matters most.



<https://www.swpc.noaa.gov/products/solar-cycle-progression>

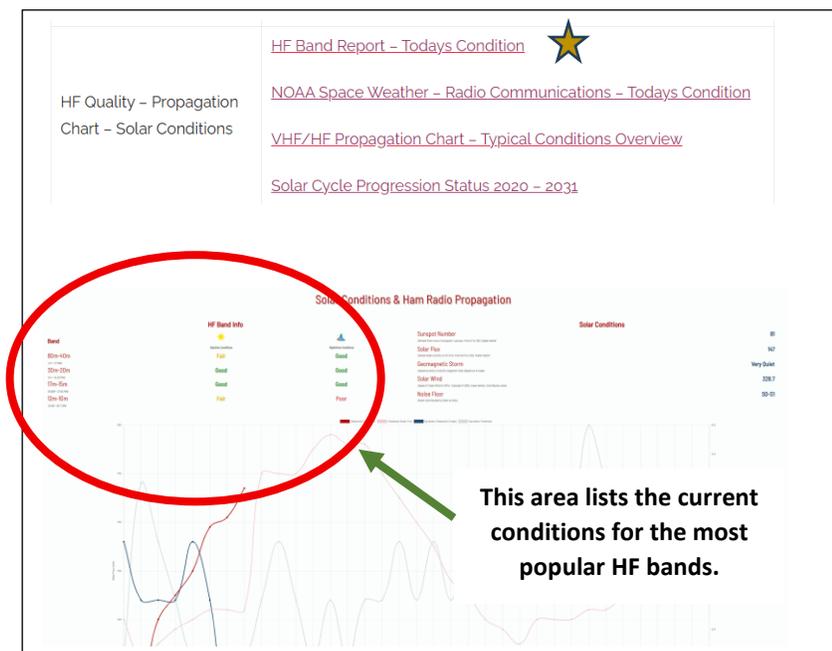
### How does the solar cycle shape radio performance?

The Sun's 11-year activity cycle (see chart above) often changes the ionization levels in the ionosphere, which determines how far and how clearly HF signals travel. Conditions can and often change within minutes.

### Where can I find the current conditions quickly and easily?

In order to provide up-to-date condition reports, MERT's website [KG4NXO.com](http://KG4NXO.com) has a "Quick Links" tab on the front page... which goes to a page two listing "HF Quality – Propagation Chart – Solar Conditions". Besides it is a link to - "HF Band Report – Today's Condition".

This resource is constantly updated with regular HF condition summaries 24-hours per day.



Check out [KG4NXO.com](http://KG4NXO.com) for the most up-to-date conditions on High Frequency (HF) band conditions.

This will be a part of the MERT 22 Special Event activities scheduled for April 18<sup>th</sup> (Saturday) from 8:00 am to 2:00 PM.

All hams are invited to participate.



## **MERT NEEDS YOU!**

**Please renew your participation in MERT activities,  
practicing Winlink messages and weekly radio Nets.**

### **MCSO Laptop Updates**



Many thanks to members Ray Sherwood, Cindy Sheffield, Santos Pegan and Jim Lowe for taking charge of seeing the MCSO laptops MERT uses during all activations have been charged with all firmware and Microsoft OS upgrades completed. These ongoing efforts keep the units ready for deployment throughout the year.

### **Member Update**

Harlan Cook shares this photograph of his sister Jenith Peterson visiting from Dallas.

Besides seeing WEC, she also received a tour of the radio room and PIT and was amazed at both.



**Jenith Peterson (Dallas) visits the WEC during her visit  
with her brother Harlan.**

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

**[KG4NXO.com](http://KG4NXO.com)**

All amateur radio operators and the general public are welcomed to attend all MERT meetings every Wednesday from 9:00 am till Noon at the

**Emergency Operations Center (EOC)**

**692 NW 30<sup>th</sup> Ave., Ocala, FL.**

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*“Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change  
the world are the ones who do.” – Steve Jobs*



Marion County Emergency Radio Team

# Code of Excellence

## *“Our Commitment to Service, Skill, and Stewardship”*

### ➤ *Integrity First*

We uphold honesty, transparency, and accountability in every action and decision.

### ➤ *Technical Mastery*

We pursue excellence in radio communications, infrastructure, and emergency response systems.

### ➤ *Community-Centered*

We serve Marion County with compassion, readiness, and respect for all.

### ➤ *Empowered Volunteers*

We foster mentorship, training, and recognition to build a resilient team.

### ➤ *Clear Communication*

We speak with clarity, purpose, and professionalism—on the air and in every outreach.

### ➤ *Continuous Improvement*

We innovate, adapt, and refine our systems to meet evolving needs.

### ➤ *Gratitude and Recognition*

We celebrate all contributions and honor the spirit of volunteerism.

***We are...***

***The Marion County Emergency Radio Team!***

*“The quality of your life will be determined by the quality of your contribution. When you work to improve the lives of others, your life improves automatically.” – Kurek Ashley*