

# MERT

Marion County Emergency Radio Team



Marion County Sheriff's Office  
Division of Emergency Management

## **COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE**

**April 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, May 16th,**  
**10:00 am at the EOC**

**All are Welcomed!**

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

### **Building Our Winlink Skills Together**



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

One of the strengths that makes MERT so effective (and a reliable resource for the Division of Emergency Management) is the wide range of skills, backgrounds, and life experiences **each of us** brings to our mission. Not everyone joins MERT with a strong amateur radio background, emergency management knowledge or, advanced computer skills. That's why we meet regularly to train and Elmer each other in learning new skills and practicing new systems and technologies.

Each small step we individually take in learning a key skill - results in a BIG STEP in MERT's collective knowledge and capability!

For some members, one of those new skills is learning the **Winlink digital messaging system** – which is **ONLY** available to licensed amateur radio operators! While not everyone has the equipment at home to run Winlink (that's perfectly okay), but what is important is that every member takes the time to learn the basics of this digital messaging system. It's one of the most reliable "communication" resources we have during activations, and it's a core skill that allows us to serve the emergency managers when communications matter most at Shelters, the EOC and wherever MERT is deployed.

"Why is that?", you ask. The simple reason is not "every communication" can be transmitted by voice, especially when absolute accuracy is required or, when there's lengthy details to be

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

communicated. Further, Winlink messaging is required when sending and receiving official ICS forms, support documents or images needed by emergency responders and managers. Did you know... that Winlink is a Homeland Security/FEMA supported digital messaging system?

Winlink is capable in sending messages to and from regular Internet email addresses and can also send messages directly between radio operators over the radio waves (called Peer-to-Peer transmissions). This capability ensures that important information can be disseminated quickly and effectively along with being able to be forwarded quickly, even in the absence of traditional communication networks.

Winlink's ability to send messages far beyond the reach of radio voice transmissions to and from regular Internet email addresses (outside the affected emergency area) is a unique capability ensuring important information is shared quickly and effectively. That's why MERT uses it and trains members on it.

To help everyone succeed, MERT supports weekly training opportunities on our Thursday Winlink Net. These sessions are designed for all experience levels — whether you're brand new, a little unsure, or just out of practice. You'll never be put on the spot, and you'll always have someone ready to guide you step-by-step.

If you don't have a TNC or radio with internal sound card, you can still participate and learn the workflow to build confidence by attending our Wednesday Check In meetings to help you get there at your own pace. Every member's participation strengthens the whole team. I encourage each of you to take a little time each week to practice, ask questions, and grow your Winlink skills. Your involvement (and support) truly makes a difference.

Thank you for everything you do to support MERT and our mission of serving our community when it needs us most. **Your presence matters. Your skills matter. Your voice matters.**

With sincere appreciation,



**Harlan Cook KN4VRM**  
MERT Coordinator



**MERT NEEDS YOU!**

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

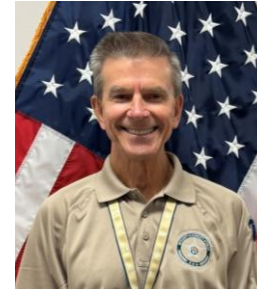
*"When we strive to become better than we are, everything around us becomes better too." - Paulo Coelho*

## From the Deputy Coordinator - It's About That Time!

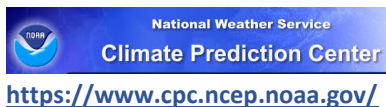
As the calendar moves forward through spring, Floridians begin to look ahead to the upcoming hurricane season (which officially begins June 1) and wonder what might be in store? This is a particularly important subject for **MERT**, as our primary mission of supporting EMCOMM at school evacuation shelters is almost always the result of hurricane-related activations.

For the early bird watchers, there are a number of sources that offer pre-season hurricane forecasts for the Atlantic basin, providing predictions for a) the number of named storms, b) the number of hurricanes, and c) the number of major hurricanes (Category 3 or higher on the Saffir-Simpson scale). It is important to note that these seasonal forecasts predict overall activity, not where the storms go or whether or not Florida gets hit.

There are three sources that are generally considered to be the “best-in-the-business”. One is a government source, one an academic source, and one a private-sector source.



Ray Woody (WB6FKJ)  
Deputy Coordinator



The top government source is a branch of NOAA's National Weather Service, known as the Climate Prediction Center (CPC). They produce the official U.S. government outlook. The CPC is highly regarded because this is part of their operational responsibility, and their prediction forms the baseline reference forecast for the rest of the industry.

The top academic source is Colorado State University (CSU), where Dr. William Gray (now deceased) pioneered the idea of seasonal hurricane forecasting in 1984. The CSU forecasts are the most widely publicized in the media and emergency management communities.

The top private-sector source is AccuWeather, a prominent private weather company. AccuWeather's outlook is also widely communicated by the media.

When are these seasonal forecasts first issued? AccuWeather is usually the earliest, and in fact, they just released their 2026 outlook on March 25<sup>th</sup> (more on this shortly). Colorado State is next and have announced April 9<sup>th</sup> as their release date. The Climate Prediction Center issues their comprehensive forecast in late May.

Each of these sources uses their own methodologies for producing their forecast products, but the primary factors that are always considered are the following:

- ✓ Sea surface temperatures. Tropical water temperatures are the “fuel” for the storms (80° F. is the smallest threshold).

- ✓ El Nino or La Nina. This is called the El Nino-Southern Oscillation (ENSO for short). The state of ENSO significantly affects the upper air patterns over North America and the Atlantic basin and therefore the amount of wind shear in the tropics (high wind shear tends to tear apart tropical depressions before they can develop into strong hurricanes).
- ✓ Sea Level Pressures. Lower sea level pressures are more conducive to active years.
- ✓ Saharan Dust. Large plumes of dry and dusty air from Saharan Africa that moves out into the main development region of the Atlantic can suppress storm formation. (One factor in reducing 2025 hurricane developments.)
- ✓ West African Monsoon. The strength of this monsoon determines the quantity and strength of the “tropical waves” that are generated and traverse across the Atlantic, Caribbean, and Gulf of America.

**2026** - Early indications reveal that there is a very likely probability of a strong El Nino forming in the eastern Pacific Ocean, and this pattern typically reduces Atlantic hurricane activity (due to the increased mid- and upper-level wind shear). This developing El Nino seems to be reflected in the aforementioned AccuWeather forecast that was just released, where they are predicting a near to slightly below-average season compared to the historical averages (4-7 hurricanes vs historical average of 7, and 2-3 major hurricanes vs historical average of 3). We'll have to “stay tuned” for the CSU and CPC forecasts to see if they agree with AccuWeather.

The bottom line is that there really is some predictive skill in these pre-season forecasts. All of them are better than climatology and have recorded moderate to good accuracy assessments over the years. At a minimum, they can tell us whether a season is likely to be busy or quiet.

Before closing, there are two interesting facts about the 2025 season worth sharing. For the first time since 2015, there were no hurricanes that made landfall in the continental U.S. Despite this, the 2025 season produced three Category 5 hurricanes (Erin, Humberto, and Melissa), which is the second-highest number on record (2005 was the highest, with five Cat 5 hurricanes that year). We can thank steering currents for keeping the 2025 storms away from the U.S. borders.

Whatever the season brings, it is incumbent upon MERT to ensure that we are ready to respond to the call whenever it is received!

**Ray Woody WR6FKJ**  
Deputy Coordinator

*“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*

## MERT 22 Update – All are Welcomed!

Activity: **MERT 22 Special Event Training Exercise**

Date: **Saturday, April 18th**

Time: **7:00 am to 12:00 noon**

Location: EOC radio room and grass areas besides bldg.

MERT conducts a special training exercise each year in the Spring celebrating our creation by the Division of Emergency Management in 2004. This year's event, "**MERT 22**" is scheduled for April 18th (Saturday) which also celebrates World Amateur Radio Day. This year, we will follow our traditional schedule of activities starting at 7:00 am until 12-noon (may extend longer if radio propagation conditions are favorable) where we conduct live radio operations across all the amateur radio bands to make contacts with other radio operators locally (Marion County), regionally (N. FL), across the U.S. and internationally.

We use all the radios in the EOC radio room and all the antennas on the tower (which confirms operational readiness) while also inviting our members to bring their personal "Go Kits" and set them up on the grass area in front of the radio room access door where they will also be attempting to make contacts. MERT also activates its very unique NVIS antenna (for N. FL contacts) as part of the exercise.

MERT Members – this is an important training exercise so plan on participating.

Note: World Amateur Radio Day, held on April 18th each year, is celebrated worldwide by radio amateurs and their national associations which are organized as member-societies of the International Amateur Radio Union (IARU). It was on this day in 1925 that the IARU was formed in Paris. American Radio Relay League (ARRL) Co-Founder Hiram Percy Maxim was its first president. More information at: <https://www.arrrl.org/world-amateur-radio-day>

## Thank You, Sheriff Woods!

During the March 26<sup>th</sup> Sheriff's Office Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon, Sheriff Billy Woods stopped by MERT's table to personally greet our team.

His visit sparked a moment to reflect on how fortunate we are to have his support... so I thanked him for the tremendous support, trust and quality resources we receive from him, Director Preston Bowlin, and all the staff. The support received is never taken for granted as it strengthens our capabilities to serve Marion County when it matters most. **"Call MERT, when all else fails!"**

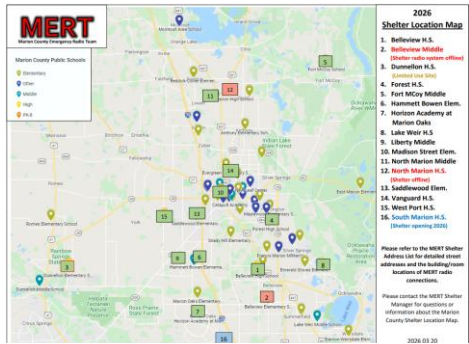


**Sheriff Billy Woods**

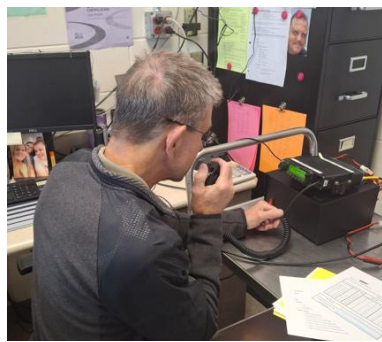
*"The heart of a volunteer is not measured in size, but by the depth of the commitment to make a difference in the lives of others." – DeAnn Hollis*

Moments like the meeting with Sheriff Wood's reminds me that MERT is part of a much larger family of dedicated public-safety professionals who believe in the work we do together. I'm sincerely grateful for each of you who carry that mission forward with commitment, skill, and a big volunteer's heart!

## Emergency Shelter Testing Update



MERT map detailing all Shelters.



Deputy Coordinator Ray Woody (WB6FKJ) conducting shelter testing.

Great news to share! MERT successfully completed the annual Shelter Audits & Communications Tests at 12 emergency shelters on March 17th and 18th.

The expanded testing plan included radio operational tests over all five repeaters

positioned around Marion County. Those repeaters are:

- ✓ KK4DFC – The primary D-Star repeater for MERT shelter operations
- ✓ KG4NXO (2 Meter) – Backup D-Star repeater for MERT shelter operations
- ✓ KG4NXO (70 cm) – Backup D-Star repeater for MERT shelter operations
- ✓ KJ4CLL - Primary open FM repeater for supporting CERT communities, HEC
- ✓ hospital/emergency care centers and the MBA Disaster Relief organization.
- ✓ NA4DA - our Ocala Forest repeater (newly added this year to the test lineup) that serves as primary for EOC-to-EOC comm's - as well as an additional MERT shelter backup comm's.

This year, members also documented the SWR results for our records and identified two facilities for further testing as SWR's were higher than recommended.

Overall, the test results were good to excellent at all facilities tested. There are two exceptions:

1. The shelter at the Dunnellon H.S. was not tested as access to the radio room was unavailable.
2. The planned tests over Winlink digital communications were not performed as the radio was impacted by an Internet outage associated with the recent change in MCSO's ISPs.

All the test results and documentation have been updated and are now available in the Shelter Guide Reference Manual (MERT's **BLUE Book**).

*"I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something." – Edward Everett Hale*

We extend our sincere thanks to **Logan Stamp**, Div. of Emergency Management Coordinator for coordinating the testing with the Marion County Public School District (MCPS) along with the assistance and support of MCPS employees **Cynthia Barnes** and **John Barattini**. It was a pleasure to work with both individuals who helped MERT successfully complete our tests this year. **To all the members who participated – THANK YOU!**

**MERT**  
Marion County Emergency Radio Team

2024 RADIO TEST PLAN - FINE-TUNE, SWR TEST AND PHYSICAL TEST

TEST DAY SWR & RECORDING RESULTS: **OK - See Below**

TEST DAY SWR & RECORDING RESULTS: **X** *Important: Do not proceed with additional testing if SWR exceeds 2.0*

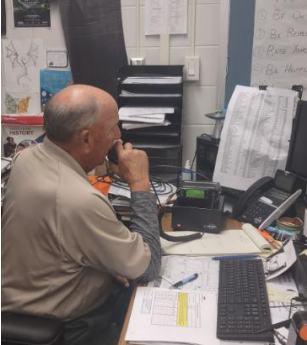
After you have the SWR checked please email the results to the Emergency Management Coordinator. If you have any questions or need assistance with the testing process, please contact the Emergency Management Coordinator. If you have any questions or need assistance with the testing process, please contact the Emergency Management Coordinator. If you have any questions or need assistance with the testing process, please contact the Emergency Management Coordinator.

Test Frequency (MHz)	Channel	Mode	SWR Pass	SWR Fail	Comments
146.520	6	DMR	YES	NO	
146.520	16	DMR	YES	NO	
146.574	1	DMR	YES	NO	
146.574	12	DMR	YES	NO	
146.520	3	DMR	YES	NO	
146.520	14	DMR	YES	NO	
146.574	3	DMR	YES	NO	
146.574	2	DMR	NO	NO	
146.574	12	DMR	NO	NO	

SWR BY NAME: **John Barattini**

SWR BY NAME: **Cynthia Barnes**

TEST DATE & TIME: **10/24/2024**



*“Wherever you turn, you can find someone who needs you. Even if it is a little thing, do something for which there is no pay but the privilege of doing it. Remember, you don’t live in the world all of your own.” — Albert Schweitzer*



*“Volunteering is an act of heroism on a grand scale. And it matters profoundly.” – Unknown*

## A note to all the Members supporting the Shelter Audits/Tests

Thank you for dedicating two full days to testing the radio systems at 12 emergency shelters. Your commitment ensured that each antenna, cable, and connection is ready for reliable operation when we need it most. This kind of thorough, hands-on testing is exactly what makes MERT such a trusted and respected resource for the Division of Emergency Management. Your professionalism, teamwork, and willingness to give your time and expertise is deeply appreciated. You make a real difference!

### Team Leaders

- **Nick Kiddey**
- **Phil Lewis**
- **Ray Woody**

### Team Members

<b>Dave Smith</b>	<b>Kim Shulby</b>	<b>Fred Herman</b>
<b>Cindy Sheffield</b>	<b>Santos Pagan</b>	<b>Jeanne Herman</b>
<b>Ray Sherwood</b>	<b>Mark Weible</b>	

## Thank you Ray for the awesome job!

It is important to recognize **Deputy Coordinator Ray Woody** for the significant leadership, time and effort he put into planning and organizing this year's Shelter project. Ray created great plans, data forms and then prepared everyone to complete the vitally important shelter audits and testing with quality. Well done Sir!



## New Member – Dave Smith



**Dave Smith (KG5RF) receiving his New Member Orientation Task Book.**

We are very happy in welcoming **Dave Smith, KG5RF** MERT's newest member. Dave has energetically embraced the challenges in learning the many details amateur radio operators must become knowledgeable of along with the ICS certifications new members must secure (a challenge due to the federal funding issues).

As MERT members know, learning all the new emergency communications details can be daunting so thanks to everyone for pitching in and being great Elmers' helping Dave on his new learning path!

## Training Skill Book Approvers

The following members are authorized and eager to sign off on all Level 1 and Level 2 Tasks completed by members. Please see:

<b>Ray Woody</b>	<b>Phil Lewis</b>	<b>Harlan Cook</b>
<b>Bill Sobel</b>	<b>Nick Kiddey</b>	

<b>MERT</b> Marion County Emergency Radio Team <b>TRAINING SKILL BOOK</b> and <b>New Member Orientation Guide</b> <u>Skill Book Assigned To:</u>	
Name: _____	Call: _____
MERT Member Since: _____	Position/Assignment: _____
Email: _____	Phone Number: _____

## Deployment Recognition Certificates

I am pleased to share I found the “lost” Deployment Certificates for Bill and Kim and presented them at recent meetings in recognizing them for their extended deployments of at least **24-hours of continuous duty** at a Shelter or the EOC. We salute them both supporting MERT’s Mission!



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

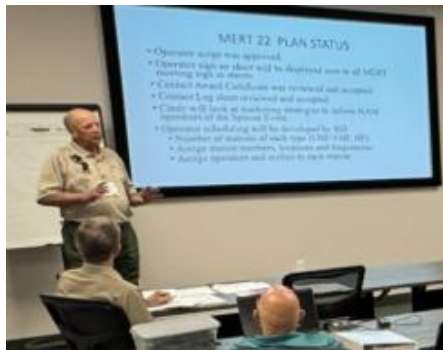


**Kim Shulby, KM4JMZ receives her Deployment Certificate for 24-hours of continuous duty at the Dunnellon Shelter.**

## Wednesday “Check In” Updates - March

March was very busy for members as we had two major activities underway:

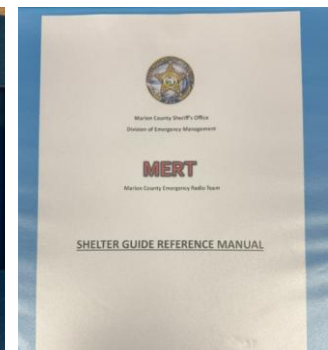
- Shelter Audit & Testing planning, assignments, forms, completion and results
  - Training included SWR testing units, procedures and understanding results
- MERT 22 (April 18<sup>th</sup>) planning activities, schedules, assignments and times



**03/04 – Nick Kidney w/MERT 22 Update**



**03/04 – Ray Woody reviewing plans for Shelter Audit & Tests**



**03/11 – SWR class reviewing units available, operating procedures and understanding results**

**MERT BLUE Book**

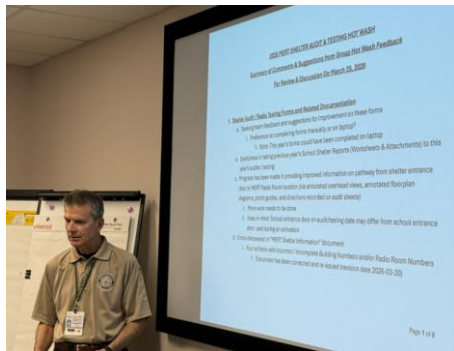
*“Volunteers do not necessarily have the time; they have the heart.” – Elizabeth Andrew*



03/25 – Marion Co. ARES Coordinator Hayden Kauffman presents impactful update “Marion County EMCOMM – United in Service: Independent in Action”



03/25 – MERT member Kraig Pritts (CERT Liaison) shares an update on the Marion County CERT Annual County-wide Exercise results.



(L) Ray Woody, Deputy Coordinator, reviews the many Hot Wash feedback recommendations and suggestions during the March 25<sup>th</sup> meeting. He thanked all the members for their focused and meaningful feedback in ideas and suggestions for improving future years Shelter Audits and Testing events.

## Sheriff’s Annual Appreciation Luncheon

All Marion County volunteers to the Sheriff’s Office were invited to participate in the Annual Volunteers Appreciation lunch to celebrate their major contributions as volunteers during the past year. Truly good food, nice deserts and lots of music were enjoyed by all – including the conga lines!



*“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*



(Row 1)  
 Sheriff Wood's in his finest attire!  
 MERT members and spouses rocking' to YMCA!  
 Coordinator Harlan Cook with Sheriff Woods.

(Row 2)  
 MERT celebrated in our finest Hawaiian attire!  
 Time to relax and enjoy the music before food  
 served.

(Row 3)  
 Having fun with BIG smiles!  
 Coordinator Harlan Cook in his finest Hawaiian

Have an idea or recommendation on something that should be included in the MERT Communications Update? Send it to [KG4NXO@marionso.com](mailto:KG4NXO@marionso.com)

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.

Communications Update 2026 04

*"If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito" — Dalai Lama*



# 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!***