

MERT

Marion County Emergency Radio Team



Marion County Sheriff's Office
Division of Emergency Management

COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

May 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.

Coordinator's Corner – May Readiness & the Power of Staying Connected



Harlan Cook (KN4VRM)
MERT Coordinator

As we move into May, our focus as a team shifts toward sharpening our readiness for the upcoming hurricane season. One of the simplest and most effective ways we stay prepared year-round is through our weekly Thursday evening Training Nets. We have two (2) so every MERT member can participate, regardless of the type of radio each have. They have moved 30-minutes earlier in the evening targeted at making it easier for everyone to participate. The new times and detailed repeater information is:

* Thursday @ 7:00 PM MERT D-STAR Practice Net

For everyone having D-Star radio or Dongle capability (KK4DFC, Frequency 146.790 Mhz.)

* Thursday @ 7:30 PM CERT-MERT Practice Net

For everyone having basic Handi-Talkie (HT) and mobile radio capabilities (KJ4CLL, Frequency 145.330 MHz. Radio or antenna offline? Use your PC and join in via "Echolink"!

All area CERT/MERT/HEC/ARES/MBA and Guest Hams are invited to Check In to one or both Nets!

Every check-in exercises your equipment, confirms your radio is functioning properly, and keeps you familiar with the procedures we rely on when the Division of Emergency

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

Management activates the emergency shelters. Just a few minutes on the air each week strengthens everyone’s skills, their confidence, and our team work as volunteers. For newer members, the Net is the perfect low-pressure environment to learn and grow in being amateur radio operators.

May is also the month when MERT becomes laser-focused on reviewing all aspects of our hurricane response capability. We complete SHREK Kit audits ensuring every SHREK kit is fully equipped and ready for deployment. We will test every radio in verifying each is programmed and operating correctly. We revisit our Shelter Operator Manuals confirming accuracy, refresh ourselves with best practices and current expectations by all entities we work with. And we review our **RED BOOK** guide detailing Pre-Activation, Activation and Post-Activation procedures so that when the Division of Emergency Management begins storm preparations, we respond with a proven process insuring clarity of operations and high confidence performance by all members.



MERT’s SHREK kit is a **fully** equipped EMCOMM Go Kit.

Your participation — on the Net and in our May readiness efforts — ensures MERT remains a dependable communications resource for the Marion County Sheriff’s Office Division of Emergency Management.

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Harlan Cook".

Harlan Cook KN4VRM
MERT Coordinator

From the Deputy Coordinator - Troubleshooting My VHF/UHF Antenna – Little Things Can Make a Difference!

After joining MERT, I was eager to get on the air at home on VHF/UHF so that I could begin taking part in our weekly Thursday evening practice nets. I bought an ICOM-7100 that at the time was on sale. For the antenna, I had to come up with a small footprint solution that would be acceptable in our HOA-restricted community. After reviewing options, I selected the famous Ed Fong-designed DBJ-1, a dual band half-wave



Ray Woody (WB6FKJ)
Deputy Coordinator

vertical dipole that does not make use of ground radials. It is encapsulated in PVC pipe and end-fed at the bottom of the antenna. A great antenna for \$75. I mounted it outside in a “stealthy” area on a six-foot tripod about 20 feet from my base station.



My wonderful view outside.

A Comet CTC-50M Window Feed-Through Jumper routes the signal indoors through the window. I am fortunate that this side of my house has an almost unobstructed view from the northeast through east and to the southeast, which from southwest Marion County gives me great access to all of the D-Star and FM repeaters that we regularly use at MERT, including the Forest tower repeater.

I got on the air quickly and have had particularly good operating results over the past two and a half years.

When we added SWR testing to this year’s school shelter testing, I realized that I had never measured the SWR on my own antenna system. In researching the DBJ-1, it is supposed to deliver 1.5 – 1.7 SWR’s across the entire 144 -148 MHz VHF 2-Meter amateur band segment. I decided to check out one of MERT’s RigExpert Antenna Analyzers and take it home to see what it would show.

Candidly, I was a little disappointed in the results. The center band reading was 2.3, with around 2.0 at 144 MHz and 2.6 at 148 MHz. Although this is certainly within a safe operating range for my radio, I decided to take a fresh look at everything to see if I could find any culprits contributing to the higher-than-expected readings. I checked:

- A) the connection at the antenna
- B) the connections on both sides of the CTC-50M jumper (as well as the jumper itself)
- C) the connection at the radio
- D) the entire 35-foot length of RG-8X coax for any defects.

I looked for evidence of water intrusion and found none. After each item I checked, I re-ran the SWR scan, but there was no change.

When I originally hooked up the coax run, I had about 15-feet of excess coax that I coiled up outside, about midway between the end-feed of the antenna and the indoor radio. Just for “kicks”, I decided to uncoil it and re-run the SWR scan. **Bingo!** The RigExpert scan showed a mid-band SWR of 1.6, with a minimum of 1.3 at 144.72 MHz, and 1.8 at 148.0 MHz, which is in fairly close agreement to what was advertised for the antenna.

Although I am pleased with the new SWR readings, I am baffled about why the coiled coax was the issue. Perhaps it was too tight of a coil (about 6-inches in diameter) and may have

created an unintended choking effect. I think it might be related to the design of the antenna, which uses no ground plane or radials. I have read where these types of antennas use the outer shield of the coax as a “counterpoise” to complete the circuit and thus are susceptible to any changes made to the cable (such as coiling it) that in turn causes the SWR to increase.

I decided to remove the excess length of the cable, as there has been no reason to move the tripod farther away from where I set it up. As I am far from being an antenna expert, but this exercise has motivated me to gain a better understanding of not just antennas themselves, but how the coax feedlines should be properly routed and deployed. That’s why they call it an antenna “system”.

Best regards to all!

Ray Woody WB6FKJ

Deputy Coordinator

Special Net Control Operator Acknowledgement

This is long overdue... and the recognition richly deserved.

I sincerely thank the following members who serve as Net Control Operators (NCO) in leading our radio Training Nets week after week - all year long! They distinguish themselves for their commitment in helping us all remain skilled by organizing and conducting the weekly testing events ensuring all members learn the procedures, refresh existing skills and test their equipment. Their enthusiasm is unwavering and deserves recognition by all.

On behalf of all members, we extend our sincerest thanks to each of you for your dedication and leadership supporting MERT's mission!



Bill Sobel
K1WLS



Nick Kiddey
W4NFK



Phil Lewis
W4EUV



Ray Woody
WB6FKJ



Gary Nicholas
KQ4HQD

Members – NCO positions are available along with classes to prepare you. Challenge yourself and learn something new! It is actually fun to be the NCO.

“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 NEEDS YOU!

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

Visit: KG4NXO.com – Your resource for great MERT information. New resource ideas are always welcomed!

MERT 22 Update

Activity: MERT 22 Special Event Training Exercise

Date: Saturday, April 18th

Time: 7:00 am to 12:00 noon

Location: EOC radio room and open area across the street

MERT conducts a special training exercise each year celebrating our creation by the Division of Emergency Management in 2004. While this years' event was challenging from a combination of solar events making HF operations almost impossible before 10:00 am, those attending shared they enjoyed the event and team camaraderie.



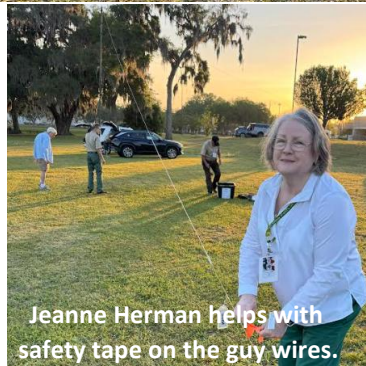
Members getting an early 7 am start in building the NVIS HF antenna.



Cindy Sheffield activates Station 7.



Ray Woody & Dave Smith set the pole.



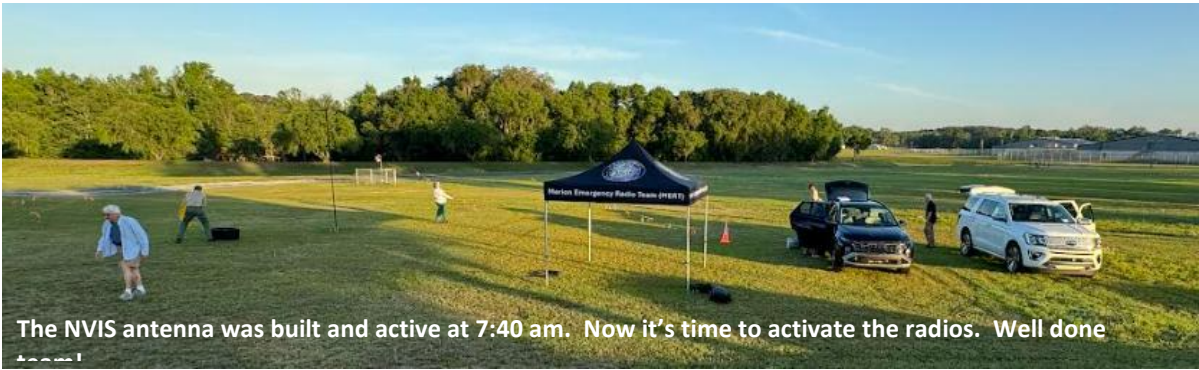
Jeanne Herman helps with safety tape on the guy wires.



Fred Herman sets the guy stake.



Fred insuring Nick Kidney does it right!



The NVIS antenna was built and active at 7:40 am. Now it's time to activate the radios. Well done

(Below L-R) Kraig Pritts and Bruce Twiss discussing the days activities.



(L-R) Bill Sobel outlines the MERT 22 activities. With him are Nick Kiddey and Ray Woody.



Bruce Twiss getting a battery for radio power.



(L-R) Jeanne Herman, Dave Smith, Fred Herman and Phil Lewis joins the meeting and Safety-First note.



Cindy Sheffield On the Air!



Mike Condon



(L-R) Cindy Sheffield making contacts with Sharon Malkk, Gray Moffett and Hayden Kaufman joining in the MERT 22 Special Event Exercise.



Thank goodness for the MERT tent. It was a hot day!



Nick Kiddey's antenna.



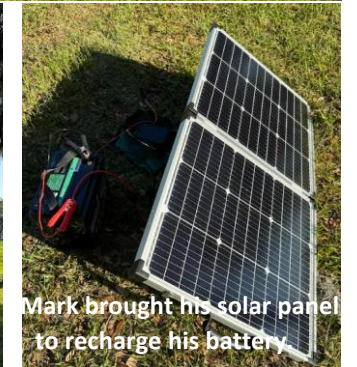
Nick Kiddey On the Air!



Mrs. Weible (scribe) with husband Mark at MERT 22.



Mark's antenna.



Mark brought his solar panel to recharge his battery



Mrs. Lewis with husband Phil enjoying some shade and a cool breeze.



Harlans antenna.



SSRC member Andy Allen with MERT member Don Webb stopped by to say Hello!



Antennas, antennas and more antennas!



(L-R) Ray Woody, Bill Sobel, Hayden Kauffman (ARES) and Nick Kiddey team worked the "clean up" crew!

New Safety Manager Announced

I am very pleased announcing **Nick Kiddey (W4NFK)** has accepted the appointment to the position of Safety Manager for MERT.

Nick brings a strong commitment to preparedness, professionalism, and operational awareness—qualities that are essential to maintaining a safe environment for all MERT activities, including deployments, training event meetings, and exercises. Nick has regularly taken the lead ensuring the health and safety of all participants. In this new role, he is responsible for ensuring our team continues to stay keenly focused on upholding the highest standards of personal and organizational safe operations in our plans, activities and emergency activations.



Nick Kiddey W4NFK
Safety Manager
New Member Manager

Please join me in **Congratulating Nick** and welcoming him into this important new leadership position. He is counting on everyone's support to strengthen our team and mission safety.

Ps: Nick has done a fabulous job since his appointment as our New Member Manager too!

For more information on the Marion County Emergency Radio Team (MERT), visit: KG4NXO.com

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

New Member – Dave Rowson



New member Dave Rowson (KR4KMW) with his daughters Shaughnn Giracca and Carlyne Mason visiting the EOC.

We are very happy in welcoming **Dave Rowson KR4KMW** as MERT's newest member. In his first meeting, Dave shared his desire to contribute to the mission of a meaningful organization helping the local community and chose MERT.

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!

Dunnellon H.S. Emergency Shelter Testing Update



Ray Woody (WB6FKJ) Deputy Coordinator



(L-R) Officer Mahaela Looper (MCSO School Resource Officer) with MERT members Jeanne Herman, Dave Smith, Santos Pagan, and Fred Herman.

MERT successfully completed the annual shelter Audit-Communications Testing at Dunnellon H.S. on April 28th.

The expanded testing plan included radio operation tests using the SHREK kit over all MERT repeaters.

This is the final site tested in verifying the quality of the antenna and cable systems.

Ray Woody (Deputy Coordinator) led the team and shared his thanks to members Jeanne & Fred Herman, Dave Smith, Santos Pagan and Nick Kiddey (who manned the EOC radio room) for their wonderful assistance in conducting these important annual tests.

(R) Member Santos Pagan helps test all the MERT batteries for good voltage after the "Battery" class. Members learned details on the types used, the correct voltages and unique chargers needed in keeping them fully operational and ready for deployments when activated.



(L) Member Santos Pagan says Hello to Hospital Team (HEC) member Duke Deshommes KO4UCY who stopped by to say Hello!

MERT works closely with the HEC team which is led by Dave Welker W2SRP.

We always enjoy visits by all amateur radio operators anytime!

April 28th - Emergency Communications (EMCOMM) Network Activated!

On Tuesday, April 28th, MERT activated all five (5) repeaters in proactively supporting emergency communications (EMCOMM) messages should they be needed by the Division of Emergency Management. This action was to clear and monitor normal repeater traffic should MERT receive instructions to pass emergency traffic between regional 911 Centers or other important governmental agencies. Counties affected included Marion, Lake, Sumter and Apopka.

MERT activated its network resulting from a significant regional wide-area Fiber Outage affecting multiple Internet providers across north Florida that lasted up to nearly 10-hours (9.5 hours in Sumter Co.). The outage is believed to have been caused by a severed underground fiber-optic line, currently suspected in Lake County (Leesburg area) along a corridor of several national fiber optic carriers owned by AT&T, Verizon and Lumen Technologies (CenturyLink / Quantum Fiber) who have extensive long-haul fiber infrastructure in the area.

The following members are recognized for their immediate willingness to activate in support on making regular announcements across all MERT repeaters and then be prepared to take emergency communications traffic should it have been requested by the Division of Emergency Management. All are sincerely thanked for their rapid support in this unexpected event!



Bill Sobel K1WLS



Nick Kiddey W4NFK



Ray Woody WB6FKJ



Harlan Cook KN4VRM

A brief summary

In a world where international tensions and cyber-attacks can disrupt critical infrastructure in an instant, MERT's continual readiness takes on even greater importance. The Marion County Sheriff's Office Division of Emergency Management depends on trained and knowledgeable radio operators who can step in with very short notice (within minutes) as global events (or local construction outages) create major local or regional impacts.

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

"Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can." – Arthur Ashe

The willingness of our members to respond **without hesitation** is what ensures MERT remains connected, informed, and supporting the Division of Emergency Management when simple... and international issues... around us impacts critical EMCOMM services.

Hayden Kauffman N2HAY (Marion County ARES Coordinator) shared this announcement on the event....

“On Tuesday, April 28, 2026, at approximately 1600, Hayden Kaufman N2HAY, ARRL Emergency Coordinator for Marion County received a telephone call from Jeff Benway KC4YAO, ARRL Assistant Emergency Coordinator for Lake County regarding a telecom outage in Lake County. He inquired about the status of Marion County comms and was advised that there had been no reports of difficulties at that time. Benway stated that he had been in contact with Mark Newby KX4LEO, Assistant Emergency Coordinator for Sumter County, and that Sumter was experiencing a cascading degradation of both wireless as well as hardline communications in county.

Jamey McKinley W4CGX, ARRL Emergency Coordinator for Lake County requested that Marion provide a radio presence on the K4LAK repeater in The Villages. Kaufman acknowledged and then checked in on the repeater. Once establishing good comms with Lake and Sumter, a notification was made to **Harlan Cook KN4VRM, MERT Coordinator** in response to the request. Contacts were made to responsible operators, and a presence was maintained on all **MERT repeaters**, as well as the K4LAK repeater. While there were no requests for relay operations during the peak of the outage, Marion County ARES as well as **MERT** once again proved that cooperation during a potentially challenging operational period was not only possible, but achievable. Our nearly instantaneous response to a request from a partner agency (Lake Co. ARES on behalf of the Lake Co. Sheriff’s Office) has shown that we are stronger together, and that the combination of our resources proved resiliency in nearly any communications task requested of us.

This activity provided both of our organizations with an opportunity for training: it would be beneficial for our operators to have a copy of our partner counties’ ICS-205 forms for reference so that we will be in a position to be better prepared for intercounty communications when expected resources may be compromised, impaired or unavailable.”

Wednesday “Check In” Updates - April

In April, members focused on these activities:

- MERT 22 (April 18th)
 - Planning activities, schedules, assignments and times
- Dunnellon Shelter Audit & Test
 - April 25th
- SHREK Backup Battery Update
 - MERT battery types, voltages and chargers



SHREK Backup Battery Update

Background: Why MERT Provides a Battery with every SHREK Kit

When the Marion County Emergency Radio Team (MERT) is activated by The Sheriff's Office Division of Emergency Management to support emergency shelters, each deployed member must be fully self-sufficient. From one's personal Go Kit supplies (clothing, sleeping, personal hygiene, etc.) to medications and other individual needs, all are necessary to provide, and maintain, continuous radio operation capability by the Operator.

It's the same with each operator's radio systems equipment. That's why the SHREK kits are exceptionally well equipped to support continuous operations in many different circumstances.

Another necessary element to reliable operations is continuous electrical power. While the majority of all emergency shelters have stand-by power generators on site have "fast connect" mobile unit capability which are deployed to some shelters when need

The key point is that power reliability is never guaranteed during activations as the school may have restricted power generation capacity, limited access to backup power outlets or supplemental power resulting from failures, etc. That's why every deployment includes a 5

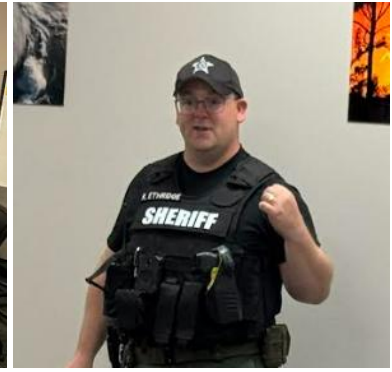


MERT's custom Emergency Kit

“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



Members review the plans for the upcoming MERT 22 event.



Rob Ethridge, EM Coordinator visit.



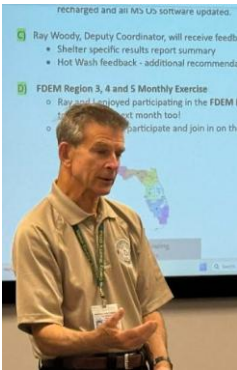
Director Bowlin shares new repeaters approved!



Santor Pagan updating PC's.



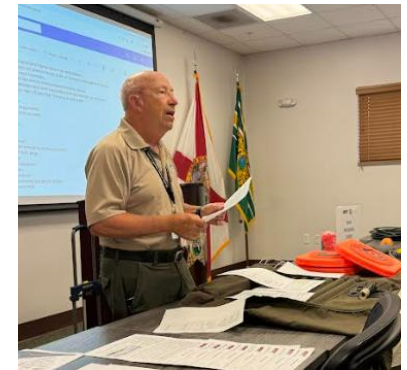
Mike Condon sharing "m1ke SHARK"



Ray Woody Shelter Hot Wash.



Phil Lewis presenting a great class on WINLINK basics.



Bill Sobel sharing MERT 22 update.

Have an idea or recommendation on something that should be included in the MERT Communications Update? Send it to KG4NXO@marionso.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 30th Ave., Ocala, FL.

Communications Update 2026 05

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