

# MERT

Marion County Emergency Radio Team



Marion County Sheriff's Office  
Division of Emergency Management

## **COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE**

**June 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, July 15th, 10:00  
am at the EOC**

**All are Welcomed!**

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

### **Coordinator's Corner – The Power of YOU!**



**Harlan Cook (KN4VRM)**  
MERT Coordinator

As we approach the second half of the year and the start of the 2026 hurricane season on June 1st, I find myself reflecting on what truly makes MERT strong. It isn't just the radios we operate or the new HF antennas and SHARES capabilities we're working to add this year. It isn't the equipment, the training sessions, or even the technical improvements we've achieved—impressive as they are. What makes MERT exceptional is the people behind all of it... **YOU.**

Every improvement we've made this year has been driven by volunteers who choose to give their time, energy, and expertise. That choice is powerful. It's what transforms equipment into capability, and capability into readiness. Working alongside each of you—learning together, solving problems together, making improvements (small and large), and supporting one another—has been one of the most rewarding parts of my role. Volunteering with MERT isn't just about service; it's about connection, purpose, and a shared commitment to all of the communities in Marion County.

As the 2026 hurricane season approaches, I want to say clearly how pleased I am of our collective work so far. As the MERT Coordinator, I could not be prouder of the dedication I see across this team. We train not because we expect disaster, but because we know Emergency Management depends on us if one comes. Should we be activated, we stand ready to support the emergency shelters and all the residents and guests inside them, young and old, who rely on us as the last line of communication when everything else fails.

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

Our strength is measured by our members. In you. In us. In the network we support together. Thank you for showing up, for caring, and for being the heart of MERT. Thank you for everything you do to support our mission of serving our community when it needs us most.

Your presence matters. Your skills matter. Your voice matters. Please answer the call when it comes.

With sincere appreciation,



Harlan Cook, KN4VRM  
MERT Coordinator

### **From the Deputy Coordinator - You May Want to Join This Mailing List**

I reside in an HOA community which always means there will be certain constraints on amateur radio antennas. An HOA community is enjoyable in many respects, but not particularly so for Ham enthusiasts looking for a workable HF antenna solution that does not violate covenants.

I have been searching for HF antenna candidates that might work in my HOA setting. Searches invariably lead you to a number of websites and even social media pages devoted to the subject. One particular site that I keep an eye on is Greyline Performance Antennas, which is well known for their HOA-friendly flagpole HF vertical dipole antennas.

I have not made any purchases from Greyline yet, but I did subscribe to their email list. I usually receive one or two emails each month. While these predictably contain promotional content, I have found that they also include useful articles, tools, and links to helpful and interesting resources. I actually look forward to receiving them.

Here are some recent examples.

On the Monday after our Saturday, April 18th **MERT 22** Exercise, the Greyline e-mail contained an interesting account of why the HF bands went dead over that past weekend. It described the coronal hole on the sun that fired a high-speed solar wind stream at Earth. By Saturday morning (**MERT 22** day), NOAA registered a G2 moderate geomagnetic storm, with the **Kp** index climbing to six (6). They also included a simplified way to look at **Kp**, likening it to a weather forecast for your antenna:



**Ray Woody (WB6FKJ)**  
Deputy Coordinator

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

- a Kp between 0 – 2 is flat calm and usually means open bands;
- a Kp between 3 - 4 is “partly cloudy”; and
- a Kp anywhere between 5 – 9 represents moderate to strong storms causing widespread disruption.

Although this Greyline analysis was not as comprehensive as Harlan’s “**MERT 22** HF Bands Outage” analysis, it was an excellent quick read right after our event.

The Greyline e-mail sent on May 12 featured a user-friendly Coax Loss Calculator. Here is the link ([greylineperformance.com/pages/feedline-loss-calculator](http://greylineperformance.com/pages/feedline-loss-calculator)). It is free and does not involve any login. Simply choose the feedline type and operating band from the dropdown menu, and input your run length and transmit power, and it will display results for line loss (dB), watts at the antenna, and watts lost as heat. It also contains their rationale for not skimping on your choice of feedline. “Running 100W from the radio with only 50W reaching the antenna effectively cuts your station in half. Doubling power to compensate (100W to 200W) costs significantly more than upgrading to better coax.”

A worthy read is Greyline’s discussion on the importance of an antenna’s “aperture” and why it is a better metric of an antenna’s effectiveness than physical length. It is an interesting read. Visit: <https://greylineperformance.com/pages/antenna-aperture-and-gain?>

I am very tempted to purchase their 20-foot flagpole antenna (allowable by my HOA) but have not pulled the trigger yet. (Greyline Mailing List - <https://greylineperformance.com/> )

Best regards to all!

**Ray Woody WB6FKJ**

Deputy Coordinator

### **Net Control Operator Class**

MERT is planning a Net Control Operator (NCO) class and will announce the date soon. You may ask.... What is an NCO and what do they do?

The NCO is the person in charge of managing and coordinating radio traffic during a Net (also referred to as a “Communications” or “Training” Net) and defined as a scheduled or ad-hoc group of amateur radio operators communicating on a set frequency for a specific purpose. Think of the NCO as the “conductor” or “host” of the Net, ensuring smooth, orderly, and efficient Communications between all participants.

**Members** – NCO positions are available. Challenge yourself and learn something new! It is actually, fun to be the NCO and I look forward to the opportunity.

*“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 Coordinator Update on Supporting our new Safety Manager

Safety is a core pillar of every successful organization, and especially for the Marion County Emergency Radio Team. We can only fulfill our mission of providing dependable communications from the shelters during emergencies if we ourselves operate safely in our conduct and actions.



**Nick Kiddey W4NFK**  
**Safety Manager &**  
**New Member Manager**

The appointment of **Nick Kiddey, W4NFK**, as MERT's new Safety Manager strengthens our commitment to ensuring that every deployment, training event, and exercise is conducted with the highest level of awareness and preparedness.

In amateur radio, the Safety Manager serves as the team's eyes and ears for risk prevention—monitoring operating conditions, identifying potential hazards, and ensuring that equipment, power sources, and operating spaces meet safe standards. Within MERT, this role carries added importance. Our operators work in shelters we do not control, and our training and field environments can present unique and sometimes unexpected conditions. Nick's leadership will help ensure that every member returns home safely and without injury after every activity.

Supporting Nick is simple but vital. Members can help by following established safety procedures, reporting concerns promptly, maintaining their equipment responsibly, and staying aware of their surroundings during every activity—whether in the classroom, the EOC, MERT warehouse, or during training exercises. By strengthening our shared responsibility, we continue building a culture of safety awareness that benefits every operator. Thank you for your fullest support.

**HC**

## New Member News



In May, new member **Gavin Karelitz (K2ETC)** receives his Level 1 ID badge from Deputy Coordinator Ray Woody (WB6FKJ). We congratulate Gavin on his eagerness to learn more about MERT's mission and objectives. All members are invited to offer their support and Elmer skills at every opportunity.

Welcome to MERT Gavin!

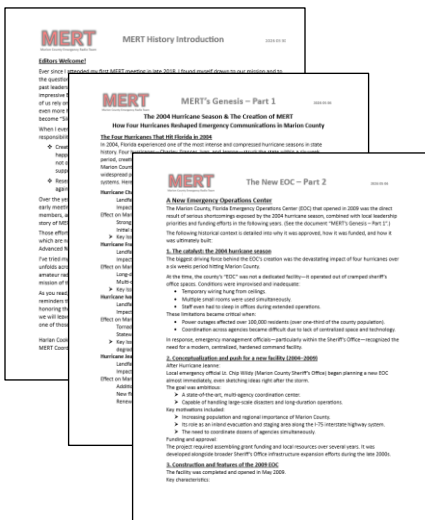
New Member Dave Smith (KG5RF) receives his Levels 1 & 2 ID Badges from Deputy Coordinator Ray Woody (WB6FKJ). We congratulate Dave on his enthusiasm to complete and be approved for full access to all Shelter facilities as an emergency communications operator when called upon.

Dave MERT has also enthusiastically embraced MERT’s mission and objectives and already is on the air with Winlink messages during our weekly training Nets!



(L-R) Ray Woody, Dave Smith and Harlan Cook.

## The History of MERT



Ever since I attended my first MERT meeting, I found myself drawn to our mission and to the questions of how this remarkable organization came to be — and especially to the story behind our past leaders (both within MERT and the Division of Emergency Management), our incredibly impressive EOC, and the advanced emergency communications radio room and systems that so many of us rely on today. It was a major disappointment to discover that no written history existed, and even more heartbreaking to learn that nearly all of MERT’s earliest leaders and senior members had become “Silent Keys”.

When I eventually became a “senior member,” and later was asked to serve as Coordinator, I felt a responsibility to change that. Two priorities quickly rose to the top:

- ❖ Create and share a regular newsletter that highlights what MERT is doing and who is making it happen. Volunteers support what they understand and feel connected to — and a newsletter not only builds that connection; it also quietly builds our history for everyone who will lead and support MERT in the future.
- ❖ Research, collect, and publish a true “MERT History” so that our beginnings are never lost again.

In May, I published the **MERT History Introduction** along with **MERT’s Genesis – Part 1** and **The New EOC – Part 2** which chronicled (to the best information I have now) MERT’s creation and history. I’m hopeful everyone enjoys a look back to our foundations and future members will add more to it as unfolds. Please let me know if you’d like a copy. HC

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

## Honoring Those Who Answer the Call



May 20, 2026 – Deputy Coordinator Ray Woody (WB6FKJ) is shown MERT’s “Honoring Those Who Answer the Call” award by Coordinator Harlan Cook.

On March 26<sup>th</sup>, Deputy Coordinator Ray Woody received the “Spirit of the Volunteer Award” certificate from the Marion County Sheriff’s Office signed by Sheriff Woods. The award says in part... “In honor of your exceptional commitment, passion and selflessness in serving the community through the Marion County Sheriff’s Office.” Congratulations to Ray and the positive impacts he has made in supporting MERT’s mission.

To honor the award and memorialize the service for all future members to acknowledge, a new recognition of those volunteers making a difference and supporting MERT has been created. “Honoring Those Who Answer the Call” will help in building a history into the future of all the volunteers making major contributions and leading MERT.

Visit: [KG4NXO.com](http://KG4NXO.com) – Your resource for great MERT information. New resource ideas are always welcomed!

## May 16<sup>th</sup> AUXCOMM-EMCOMM Combined Meeting Update

The combined meeting of MERT, CERT, HEC, ARES, MBA and guest hams was very well attended with these speakers and presentations:

- Harlan Cook – MERT Coordinator  
MERT History - Introduction plus Parts 1 & 2
- MERT 22 HF Band Outage Update  
Multiple solar events report
- Adding 4 HF Antennas @ EOC

**MERT**  
AUXCOMM/EMCOMM MONTHLY MEETING

AGENDA  
May 16, 2026  
8:00 am

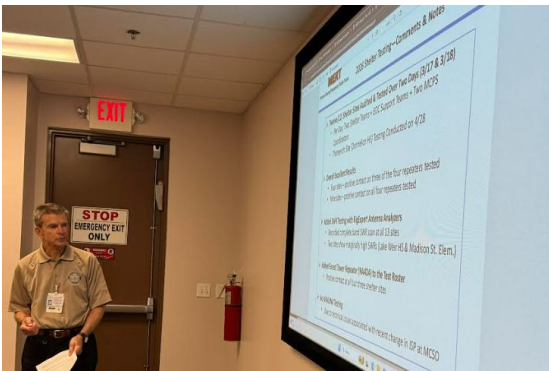
- Welcome! Harlan Cook (KNV8M)
- Pledge of Allegiance
- Attendee Introductions (Name, Call Sign and Organization)
- Silent Key Acknowledgements
  - A moment of silence for all our friends who are informed or passed.
- MERT Coordinator Update Harlan Cook (KNV8M) MERT Coordinator
  - Welcome!
  - MERT History
    - Introduction plus Parts 1 & 2
    - MERT 22 HF Band Outage Update (sharing the multiple solar events which occurred on Saturday, April 18th)
    - MERT Adding four HF Antennas to the EOC inventory
- Deputy Coordinator Update Ray Woody (WB6FKJ) Deputy Coordinator
  - Update on Shelter Testing Action Items
    - Dunnetton HS Audit / Testing Results from 4/28/2026
    - Re-Visit
    - SWR Troubleshooting Visits to Lake Weir HS & Madison Street Elementary Scheduled for 6-9-2026
  - Remote Business Activities for Upcoming Hurricane Season
    - SHREX Kit Inventory Audit
    - SHREX Kit IC-800P Radio Programming Check
    - WINLINK Training Using Equipment Issued during an Actual Activation

- HEC Update Dave Walker (N2S8P) HEC Coordinator
  - Review of the April Hospital Drill After Action report
    - What HEC did, how we did it and what we want to practice again in our next June 12th HEC Drill.
- ARES Coordinator Update Haylen Kaufman (N2H4I) Marion County ARES Coordinator
  - ARES 2026 Exercise – “Operation Southern Track”
    - This will be an excellent multi-tasking exercise for all AUXCOMM and EMCOMM Radio Operators
    - Saturday, June 20th
    - Sign up at: <https://aresnc.org/operations/southern-track/>
- MBA Update Mark White (N6GPA) MBA Liaison
  - Rapid Disaster Assessment Program review
  - Marion Mesh Initiative Update
    - MeshTrack™ is a project that enables individuals to use inexpensive LoRa radios as a long range off-grid communication platform in areas without existing or reliable communications infrastructure. This project is a community driven and open-source testing system.
- CERT Update Craig Pitts (K4ZHO) CERT Liaison
  - CERT Certification Class – Contact your Community CERT Leader Where: Emergency Operations Center (EOC), 492 NW 50<sup>th</sup> Ave, Ocala FL 34474
  - When:
    - May 30, 2026, from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 pm.
    - May 31, 2026, from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 pm.
    - June 1, 2026, from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 pm.
    - June 2, 2026, from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 pm.
    - June 3, 2026, from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
- Attendee’s Suggestions, Questions & Answers
  - Suggestions and Ideas for future presentations and classes invited.
  - Recommendations for the Good of ALL Organizations is welcomed.

For more information about the Marion County Emergency Radio Team (MERT), please visit [www.mertnc.org](http://www.mertnc.org)

- Dave Welker – HEC Coordinator  
April Hospital Drill After Action report - What HEC did, how we did it and what is next?
- Ray Woody – MERT Deputy Coordinator  
Update on Shelter Testing Action Items and Remaining Readiness Activities for upcoming Hurricane Season
- Mark Weible – MBA – Marion County Disaster Relief Coordinator  
Rapid Disaster Assessment Program review and the Marion Mesh Initiative Update

Additional topics from ARES Coordinator Hayden Kaufman was information on the **Operation Southern Track Training Exercise** planned for June 20<sup>th</sup> and Kraig Pritts update on CERT's next Certification Class starting May 30<sup>th</sup>.



**(Top Row)** Attendee's visit before the meeting starts. Dave Welker (HEC Coordinator) presenting an excellent review on the hospital systems and HEC team exercises.

**(Middle Row)** Deputy Coordinator Ray Woody shares information on the Dunnellon shelter tests and the next steps for MERT repair visits at Lake Wier HS and Madison Street Elementary on June 9<sup>th</sup>.

**(Bottom Row)** Mark Weible (MBA Disaster Relief Coordinator) shares an overview on the Rapid Disaster Assessment app. and the current efforts of the Marion Mesh Initiative.

MERT thanks every speaker for their interesting and informative presentations.

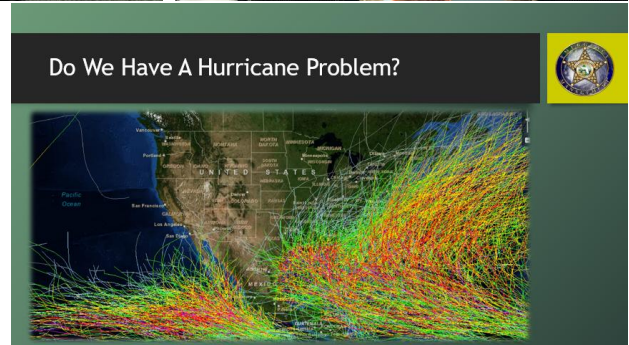
*"If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito" — Dalai Lama*

## Introducing the Division of Emergency Management

During the Wednesday, May 20<sup>th</sup> “Check In” meeting, **Nathan Hime** – Div. of Emergency Management Planner, provided an excellent overview of who the Division of Emergency Management is, what it is responsible for and why it is needed in serving the citizens of Marion County.

His presentation was very informative and presented many aspects about the Division most citizens never learn about like “Continuity of Operations (COOP)”, the detailed planning and year-long preparations the Division works on, along with the future forecasting of hurricane season forecast that La Nino’s and El Nino’s (warming or cooling phases of the oceans temperatures) can impact the results.

It was a very interesting review and MERT thanks Nathan for his time to share it with all the members. Thank you Nathan!



## Wednesday “Check In” Updates - May

In May, members focused on these activities:

- SHREK Kit Audits
  - A full audit of every kit was completed by members with only a few old headphones replaced.
- Upcoming school Shelter repair visits planned for June 9<sup>th</sup>.
- New EOC HF Antennas Update

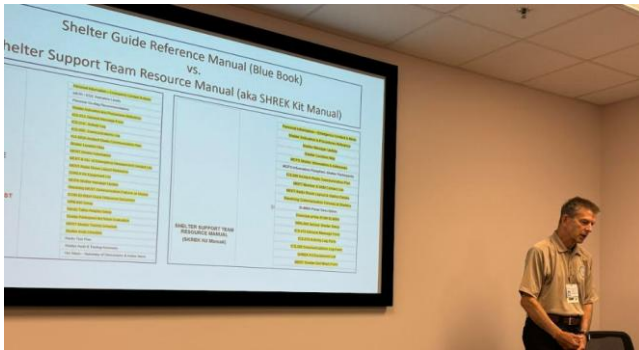


MERT's SHREK kit is a **fully** equipped EMCOMM Go Kit.

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

- Meeting reviewing the Shelter Operator Binder.
  - What and Why is this binder important?
- Who is the Division of Emergency Management and What Does Do?

These topics and more made the May meetings very interesting with many diverse subjects shared!



(Top Row) Ray Woody shares a class on the Shelter Operator Manual. Nathan Hime presenting his overview of the Div. of Emergency Management.

(Bottom Row) Deputy Rob Ethridge visits MERT. Division Director Preston Bowlin stopped by early and shared a fun story about a trip to Alaska with early attendee's Phil Lewis, Gavin Karelitz, Ray Woody, Jim Lowe and Nick Kiddey.

**MERT has a new email - Please note it for the future - [MERT.AUXCOMM@gmail.com](mailto:MERT.AUXCOMM@gmail.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 05

*"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*