

MERT

Marion County Emergency Radio Team



Marion County Sheriff's Office
Division of Emergency Management

COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

August 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, Sept. 19th,
10:00 am at the EOC

All are Welcomed!

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

Coordinator's Corner



Harlan Cook (KN4VRM)
MERT Coordinator

Every month, MERT demonstrates that readiness isn't built during emergencies — it's built in the steady, disciplined actions we take together long before those events arrive. I call this the... "Little steps to BIG steps."... process.

The steady consistency of our volunteers continues to be one of MERT's greatest strengths. Whether it's joining our weekly training nets, developing Winlink digital skills, supporting shelter operations, or using a SHREK kit for practice, these habits form the backbone of our reliability.

Readiness also requires us to adapt and evolve. Over the past two months, MERT has navigated several important changes — new uniforms, EOC access changes, 48-hour annual participation obligation and the implementation of annual medical and background checks. These revisions reflect the evolving standards of the emergency management and security environment, both locally and nationally. They also refine the responsibilities that come with volunteering at the Division of Emergency Management. While change is never simple, I'm very proud each of you have met each requirement with professionalism and a shared commitment to maintaining the highest level of operational integrity and readiness.

This month, that reliability is strengthened even further through the steadfast support of the MCSO Division of Emergency Management. Director Bowlin and his entire staff have again

"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

demonstrated their deep commitment to our mission with the purchase of two new repeaters (KG4NXO 70 cm D-Star and the KJ4CLL open FM unit at the Baseline Transfer station), replacing units that have served the county for more than 15-years. In addition, we received replacements for 12 SHREK kit power supplies. The new solid-state switching supplies replace units also 15-years old. As we know, these are all critical components in our long-term modernization effort (which still has more to do), and with their installation, our network reaches a new benchmark in operational dependability.

This investment underscores a shared belief: readiness grows when commitment is shared. Our volunteers bring consistency, awesome skills, and unwavering dedication. Our Div. of Emergency Management leadership brings trust and the resources that allow us to perform at our best. Together, we continue building a communications capability that our community can count on — not just in moments of crisis, but every day.

Thank you for remembering the spirit of our intentions is shown in the results of our actions. Your presence matters. Your skills matter. Your voice matters. Please answer the call when it comes.

With sincere appreciation,



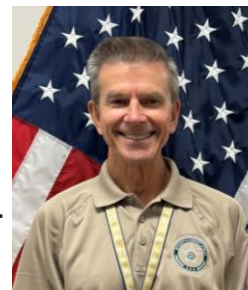
Harlan Cook KN4VRM
MERT Coordinator

Deputy Coordinator Update - MERT Equipment Procedures

MERT has always encouraged members to check out inventory items for home or off-site use, such as training, troubleshooting, and familiarization. We are fortunate that the MCSO Division of Emergency Management continues to support this practice, which helps members build better skills.

As stewards of MCSO property, we must follow reasonable procedures to make sure we can account for the whereabouts of all property at all times. This is also important in times of an unanticipated activations (yes, it happens) which may necessitate the immediate return of certain items.

As most members know, MERT already has a process in place for this purpose. It involves completing a “Material Check Out” form with all of the requested information noted (borrower’s name, ID, and phone number, date and time removed, description of equipment, MERT Tag Number if applicable, Serial number if applicable). For verification purposes, this form is also signed and dated by a Coordinator, Deputy



Ray Woody (WB6FKJ)
Deputy Coordinator

Coordinator, or any MERT Manager / Trustee / Liaison. It is then placed behind the first tabbed section of the “Equipment Sign Out Book”, which resides on the radio room bookcase shelf adjacent to the SHREK Kit notebooks.

When the item is later returned, the bottom portion of the check-out form becomes the check-in form, to be completed by the borrower. For verification that the item has been returned, the check-in portion is also signed and dated by a fellow MERT member. It is placed back into the “Equipment Sign Out Book” in the second tabbed section.

This system generally works quite well for us, but it’s easy to fall out of practice if we aren’t careful. We need to make a collective effort to stick to it. A key practice that will help in this regard is to “avoid verbal instructions”. Let’s make sure we always complete the form at the time of check-out, and again at the time of check-in, with verification signature. Otherwise, with everything we have going on, it is too easy to forget, and things end up slipping through the proverbial crack.

To assist with and encourage this consistent practice, the following minor changes are being made:

- The current Equipment Sign Out binder will change to a larger **bright yellow binder** making it readily visible in the radio room.
- New divider tabs will be used in the new binder and labeled as follows: “CHECK-OUT”, “CHECK-IN”, and “FORMS”.

A sample of the MERT Equipment Check-Out & Check-In form. The form is titled "MERT EQUIPMENT CHECK-OUT & CHECK-IN FORM" and includes sections for "CHECK-OUT" and "CHECK-IN". It contains fields for Name, Phone Number, Date, and Signature, as well as a section for "Malfunctions, Missing Items, Other Issues".

- The prior “Material Check Out” form has been updated to include a section at the bottom for describing any “Malfunctions – Missing Items – Other Issues”. The new updated form is titled “MERT Equipment Check-Out & Check-In Form”.

We encourage members to keep some copies of the “MERT Equipment Check-Out & Check-In” form with them. However, there will always be many blank forms in the binder.

As has been our practice, there is no specific time limit for returning borrowed items. Return the item when you are done using it for the purpose for which it was checked-out. If an activation occurs which requires early return of specific equipment, we will know whom to contact.

Harlan and I thank all members for their diligence and support on this important matter.

Ray Woody WB6FKJ
MERT Deputy Coordinator

“As you grow older, you will discover that you have two hands — one for helping yourself, the other for helping others.” – Audrey Hepburn

SHREK Safety and Power Supply Upgrades

Last month, MERT volunteers undertook two major upgrades which will enhance our future Shelter support efforts for years to come.

- ✓ New First Aid Travel Kits - To raise the focus on safety and in helping support all volunteers should the situation arise, 16 Basic First Aid Travel Kits were built for the SHREK kits, HF Go Kit and the NVIS Antenna Go Box. These packs include basic first aid bandages, gauze, a roll of bandage tape and two packs of triple antibiotic ointment. Let's thank Safety Manager Nick Kiddey for suggesting these upgrades! All units were installed during the July 22nd meeting.
- ✓ New Power Supplies - I'm also tickled sharing the new solid-state Switching Power supplies have been delivered. The new units are much lighter and have the capacity to power two radios should emergency situations arise. They also include both voltage and amperage meters and are much less weight over the original power supplies.



(Above) The new Samlex SEC-1235M Power Supplies are the same power capacity but **11-pounds lighter** than the 15-year-old Astron power units.

(L) The new First Aid Travel Kits and the very visible location in each unit – see lower left pocket of lid.

Strengthening Safety Across MERT Operations

As part of a broader effort in revitalizing MERT's awareness and focus on safe operations, we have begun implementing a series of practical upgrades designed to reduce risk, modernize our equipment, and reinforce a culture where safety is not an afterthought but a core operating task for all. These improvements span both our primary facilities (radio room and repeater sites) along with the SHREK units we take to the emergency shelters, ensuring that volunteers have reliable, protected, and hazard-resistant equipment during all deployments and activations.

One of the most visible enhancements is the introduction of new power supplies equipped with protected DC outlets. These units provide cleaner, safer power for radios and digital equipment,



The new SHREK power supplies have recessed DC power connectors reducing possible short circuits.

"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

significantly reducing the chance of accidental shorts, exposed contacts and cable strain. Their ruggedized design also makes them better suited for deployment in shelters, where conditions can be unpredictable and equipment is often handled by multiple operators.

These new supplies are part of a modernization plan that ensures MERT's technical backbone remains dependable, resilient, and aligned with best practices in emergency communications.



Improving Legacy Equipment with Practical Safety Additions

Safety improvements aren't limited to new hardware. In the radio room, Safety Manager Nick Kiddey has taken the initiative to enhance our existing power supplies by installing protective boots on exposed DC power posts. This simple but highly effective upgrade shields connectors from accidental shorts and adds a layer of protection for volunteers working in tight spaces around the energized equipment.

Nick's work demonstrates the spirit of continuous improvement that keeps MERT strong—small changes that collectively make a big difference in operational safety.

These upgrades reflect a broader commitment: ensuring that every volunteer, whether in the radio room or deployed to a shelter, operates in an environment where risks are minimized and equipment is designed with protection in mind.

We thank Director Preston Bowlin and his entire staff for their support in revitalizing our hardware systems while also improving the operational safety for all volunteers!

One Member's Journey to Improved Capabilities

Member Royce Hagerman (KD7SNN) is undertaking a major upgrade of his radio system and sent the photos below on his progress. Wow! When asked why?... he shares "To have a great comm center that I can use to talk everywhere I want to. To have a secure and bullet proof set up. Or.... cause I can?" Royce's ever present funny-bone comes through again. So far, the results are really impressive. The last photo shows his significant grounding and surge protection system. More soon on his work and results. Very impressive results so far Royce!



Royce Hagerman's amateur radio facility is getting major revisions to his tower, antenna and shack.

We look forward to learning more in the future.

New Uniforms for MERT

With the changes to the MCSO volunteer program, MERT members received new uniform shirts in celebrating their membership and support to the Div. of Emergency Management.



Harlan and Ray present Nick Kiddey W4NFK his new uniform.



Cindy Sheffield K9LRX receives her new uniform.



MERT Advisor Logan Stamp (Div. of Emergency Management) presents Jeanne Herman KC1CYE her new uniform.



MCSO Volunteer Coordinator Sarah Jenkins presents Kim Shulby KM4JMZ her new uniform.



Advisor Logan Stamp presents Fred Herman N1HFH his new uniform.



Ray Sherwood WA9MID receives his new uniform.



(Left) Royce Hagerman KD7SNN receives his new uniform from Logan Stamp, Emergency Management Coordinator with the Division of Emergency Management.

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

Member Recognitions



Nick Kidney W4NFK receives his Certificate recognizing his appointment as MERT's new Safety Manager. Nick has already made several positive contributions to MERT's safety program.
Thank You, Nick!



MERT welcomes new member Greg Wilemon AE4AE who receives his Level 1 ID badge at the July 1st meeting.

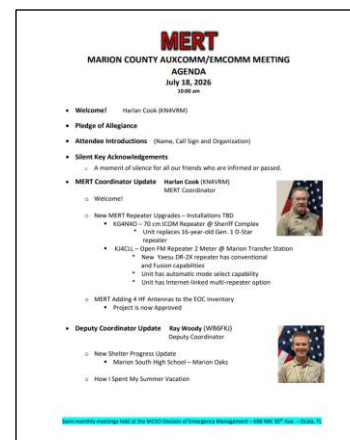


(Left) MCSO Volunteer Coordinator Sarah Jenkins presents Jeanne & Fred Herman their Level 2 ID badges at the July 1st MERT meeting. Congratulations!

Marion County AUXCOM/EMCOMM Meeting Overview

Every other month, members of MERT, the Hospital Emergency Communication Team (HEC), ARES, MBA Disaster Relief, CERT, amateur radio operators, and invited guests come together to share news, updates, and lessons learned from their organizations with all. These meetings provide timely, relevant information on recent activities, upcoming events, and operational priorities across the county.

Beyond simple information-sharing, the AUXCOMM/EMCOMM meeting plays a critical role in strengthening Marion County's emergency communications capabilities. By bringing all support organizations into the same room, the meeting fosters cooperation, builds relationships, and encourages a shared understanding of each group's capabilities and needs. This collaboration directly supports **inter-operability**—ensuring that when an incident occurs, our teams can communicate effectively, coordinate resources,



"Your talent determines what you can do. Your motivation determines how much you're willing to do. Your attitude determines how well you do it" — Lou Holtz



and operate as a unified emergency response community.

The meeting also serves as a platform for expanded training.

Participants gain exposure to new technologies, best practices, and real-world experiences from partner organizations. This cross-training helps volunteers broaden their skill sets, helps in being mission-ready, and with better understanding how their fits into the larger emergency management framework in Marion County.

In short, the AUXCOMM/EMCOMM meeting is more than a gathering—it is an essential part of Marion County’s preparedness cycle. It strengthens partnerships, enhances technical readiness, and reinforces the shared commitment we all have to serving our community during times of need.

As one of Marion County’s core emergency communication partners, MERT plays a central role in shaping the direction and effectiveness of these AUXCOMM/EMCOMM meetings. By consistently sharing technical expertise, operational insights, and lessons learned from deployments and exercises, MERT helps elevate while supporting the overall capability of every organization in the County. Our commitment to preparedness, training, and inter-agency cooperation reinforces the county’s resilience and ensures that when communication matters most, Marion County’s emergency communications volunteer teams are ready, aligned, and able to serve with professionalism and a coordinated purpose.

July’s Meeting



(Above) Dave Welker W2SRP HEC Coordinator shares an update on the hospital team activities Including primary and simplex frequencies used.



(Above) Hayden Kaufman N2HAY ARES Coordinator presents a deck on the benefits of the cooperation by all Marion County AUXCOMM/EMCOMM teams.

“When we strive to become better than we are, everything around us becomes better too.” Paulo Coelho

More photographs from the AUXCOMM/EMCOMM meeting.



(Above) Mark Weible, MBA Disaster Coordinator details who and what the Disaster Relief team does in Marion County should they be needed after a disaster.



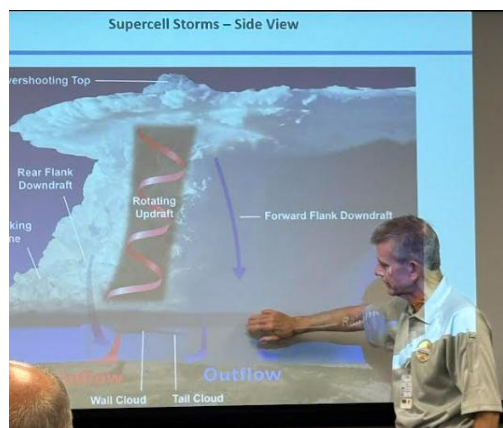
(Above) Members from different organizations review a new Raspberry Pi Controller Hayden Kaufman created in use as a Winlink Gateway.

All amateur radio operators and the public are welcomed to attend.

Weekly July Meeting Update

Wow! July was packed with many discussions and presentations ranging from learning about Winlink Gateways, Digipeaters and SSID's; where are the Marion County Gateways and Digipeaters.... to Deputy Coordinators Ray Woody's presentation on "What I did on my vacation."

While this time of year is always focused on our key responsibility of renewing our skills and knowledge of responding to any emergency activations and the procedures we follow consistent with ICS and NIMS training supporting the Division of Emergency Management, we've also had some fun discussing new technologies like Meshtastic and focusing on improving our safety awareness. I am so very proud of all our members and thank them for the time and support they've provided! YOU are the BEST!!



(Left) Deputy Coordinator Ray Woody (WB6FKJ) shares his experiences participating in a 10-day "Storm Chaser" college course hosted by the College of DuPage. His "class" travelled over 4,400 miles researching live weather events in the north U.S. plains. On top of that, he was required to submit a 10-page report. As we know Ray would, he received a A+ grade!

"Great opportunities to help others seldom come, but small ones surround us every day." – Sally Koch

This just in.... Preston Bowlin Retiring!



(Left) Division of Emergency Management Director Preston Bowlin announcing his retirement effective September 4th, 2026.

MERT will have more on this significant event in the September "Communications Update".

THIS IS YOUR LUCKY DAY, if.....



CQ, CQ..... Calling anyone, anywhere... if you own an older Kenwood Handi-talkie portable radio.

MERT received a Kenwood Charger with five PB-34 and PB-34xh batteries and is looking to give them to any radio operator having a radio they fit.

We believe these radios are compatible: TH-22A, TH-22E, TH-42A, TH-42E, TH-79A, TH-79E, TH-79AKSS

It includes a Kenwood KSC-14 Rapid Charger. Please email MERT.AUXCOMM@gmail.com if you can use them!

MERT Member Update

News from Santos Pagan, KR4FEP, Deputy Shelter Manager is moving to be nearer his family and grandchildren in the NE. We will miss Santos as he was always at the meetings early helping out, including updating the Sheriff's Office laptops used during activations for Winlink messaging. We thank Santos for his significant support and wish him always the best of everything with his family and in his new home. **Thank You, Santos!**



MERT has a new email - Please note it for the future - 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 30th Ave., Ocala, FL.

Communications Update 2026 08

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

"Remember that the happiest people are not those getting more, but those giving more." - H. Jackson Brown Jr.