



NOAA *Backgrounder*

NOAA Marine and Aviation Operations

Since NOAA's beginning, much of its oceanographic, atmospheric, hydrographic, fisheries and coastal data have been collected on NOAA ships and aircraft. These flexible, multipurpose platforms support a wide range of activities related to weather forecasting and prediction, public safety, navigation and trade, natural resource management and environmental protection.

The NOAA fleet is managed, operated and maintained by NOAA Marine and Aviation Operations, or NMAO, an office made up of officers of the NOAA Corps, a uniformed service of the United States, and civilians.

A WORD ABOUT NOAA. . .

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) conducts research and gathers data about the global oceans, atmosphere, space, and sun, and applies this knowledge to science and service that touch the lives of all Americans.

NOAA warns of dangerous weather, charts our seas and skies, guides our use and protection of ocean and coastal resources, and conducts research to improve our understanding and stewardship of the environment which sustains us all.

A Commerce Department agency, NOAA provides these services through five major organizations: the National Weather Service, the National Ocean Service, the National Marine Fisheries Service, the National Environmental Satellite, Data and Information Service, and Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research; and numerous special program units. In addition, NOAA research and operational activities are supported by the Nation's seventh uniformed service, the NOAA Corps, a commissioned officer corps of men and women who operate NOAA ships and aircraft, and serve in scientific and administrative posts.

For further information: NOAA Office of Public Affairs, 14th Street and Constitution Avenue NW, Room 6013, Washington, D.C. 20230. Phone: (202) 482-6090.

The NOAA Research Fleet

Ships: NMAO is responsible for the largest fleet of research and survey vessels operated by a Federal agency. The fleet ranges from oceanographic research ships capable of exploring the world's deepest oceans and collecting atmospheric data, to smaller ships responsible for charting the nation's coastal waters. The fleet supports a wide range of marine activities, including fisheries and coastal research, nautical charting, and long-range ocean and climate studies. NOAA's ships are specially equipped and designed to support the agency's programs, and have capabilities not found in the commercial fleet. For example, NOAA fisheries vessels can conduct joint operations of fishery stock assessments and oceanography, giving scientists a complete picture of a fish species, its habitat and its surrounding environment.

Aircraft: NMAO also manages NOAA's fleet of aircraft. These aircraft operate throughout the world, providing a wide range of research and survey capabilities—from hurricane prediction research, to snowpack surveys for flood prediction and water resource management, to coastline mapping for erosion studies, to marine mammal surveys. Like the ships, NOAA aircraft are specially modified to carry instrument packages appropriate for NOAA's missions and are unique in their ability to support the agency's atmospheric and hurricane surveillance and research programs.

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NOAA ships and aircraft are cost-effective and have demonstrated a sterling safety record and successful mission accomplishment while operating in frequently hazardous environments. Through NMAO's commitment to diligent maintenance, NOAA ships currently operate well beyond the normal service life of comparable research and survey ships; similarly, the life expectancy of its two P-3 "hurricane hunter" aircraft will extend far beyond their normal range. Such commitment has resulted in substantial cost savings to taxpayers.

Disaster Response

Because of their special capabilities, NOAA ships and aircraft may be called upon to provide immediate response to unpredictable events. NOAA survey ships located the wreckage of EgyptAir Flight 990, TWA Flight 800 and John F. Kennedy Jr.'s aircraft. NOAA ships, aircraft and personnel also conducted damage assessments after major spills from the *Exxon Valdez*, Persian Gulf War and *New Carissa*, and after major hurricanes—most recently Hurricane Isabel in 2003.

Outsourcing

When it is cost- or time-effective to do so, NOAA fulfills ship support needs by complementing its

ships with vessels from the private sector and university fleet. These charters help meet both short- and long-term needs for oceanographic and fisheries research projects that don't require the special capabilities of the NOAA fleet. Where practical, NOAA also contracts for collection of hydrographic data.

NOAA Commissioned Officer Corps

The NOAA Corps is the smallest of the seven uniformed services of the United States. It is composed of commissioned officers—who are also scientists and engineers—who provide NOAA with an important blend of operational, management and technical skills that support the agency's science and surveying programs at sea, in the air and ashore. Corps officers operate and manage NOAA's ships and aircraft as well as serve in the agency's research laboratories and program offices throughout the nation and in remote locations around the world. For example, an officer might serve as a fisheries biologist, a space weather forecaster, a "hurricane hunter" aircraft pilot, a ship captain, or a station chief at the South Pole. NOAA Corps officers serve across all the divisions of NOAA, bringing their diverse experiences into each new assignment. ♻️

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