

AGENCIES

UNITED STATES MISSION CONTROL CENTER: The United States Mission Control Center (USMCC) is the U.S. operational component of a multi-agency, multi-national program using satellites to detect and accurately position 406 MHz emergency signals from airplanes and ships in distress. This project is the Search and Rescue Satellite-Aided Tracking (SARSAT) program. The USMCC is located in Suitland, MD.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMPONENTS: Military forces may be called upon to assist in search and rescue missions for civilian personnel; however, their participation in these SAR activities must not interfere with their primary military mission.

Military commanders are responsible for SAR as it pertains to their own forces. However, since civilian and other military SAR resources may be extremely valuable to a military commander, the AFRCC routinely requests military units to conduct SAR activities within the inland area.

CIVIL AIR PATROL: The Civil Air Patrol (CAP) is a congressionally chartered, non-profit organization of volunteers devoted to the development of aviation through education, cadet youth programs and emergency services. As the official auxiliary of the Air Force, CAP willingly and effectively conducts approximately three-fourths of all aerial search activity in the inland area.

The Civil Air Patrol provides SAR mission coordinators, search aircraft, ground teams, personnel on alert status, and an extensive communications network. The Civil Air Patrol is the AFRCC's prime air resource for the inland area. Without CAP's willing and dedicated personnel, the Air Force would find difficulty fulfilling its SAR responsibilities in the inland area.

UNITED STATES COAST GUARD: The United States Coast Guard is a separate federal agency under the Department of Transportation. Just as the Air Force has SAR coordinator responsibilities for the inland area, the Coast Guard is assigned SAR coordinator responsibilities for the maritime SAR area. The maritime area is generally described as the oceanic areas surrounding the United States, the Great Lakes and all navigable waters of the United States.

FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION: The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), through its Air Route Traffic Control Centers and Flight Service Stations, monitors and flight-follows aircraft in the inland area. In some cases, individual citizens contact an FAA facility when they have knowledge of a probable SAR situation involving aircraft.

Once the AFRCC is alerted, the FAA and AFRCC work together to locate the aircraft. Initially, a review of all radio communications is accomplished in order to ascertain its closest possible position. Concurrently, other FAA facilities begin a check of all possible airports where the pilot may have landed. The AFRCC will contact relatives, friends, and business associates of the pilot or passengers that were on board. Through these contacts, the AFRCC determines the pilot's intentions, his flying capabilities, emergency equipment and other pertinent information which could assist if a search becomes necessary.

STATE AGENCIES: Most of the states in the inland area have a specific agency responsible for search and rescue. However, this may be a state agency without aircraft, or a complete well-trained responsive SAR organization with state-salaried mission coordinators and state-owned aircraft. AFRCC involvement with specific states differs depending upon the states assumption of SAR responsibility. Established SAR agreements between each state's governor and the executive agent for inland SAR delineate who is responsible for various emergencies and which agency will assume mission control. When state SAR agencies elect to retain SAR mission responsibility, the AFRCC will continue to assist by coordinating the response of requested federal resources.

"THAT OTHERS MAY LIVE"



Air Force Rescue Coordination Center



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GENERAL

Search and Rescue (SAR) in the United States is based on the humanitarian principle which compels people to render aid to those in distress. Whether providing emergency transportation of a premature infant, providing search assets to locate a missing child, or conducting an extended multi-state search for a missing aircraft covering thousands of square miles, each situation is unique and requires an extensive coordination effort among the many agencies involved in SAR.

AIR FORCE RESCUE COORDINATION CENTER

Northern Command (NORTHCOM), through the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center (AFRCC), is the premier federal agency responsible for coordinating search and rescue activities in the continental United States. AFRCC also provides search and rescue assistance to Canada and Mexico. Besides coordinating actual SAR missions, the AFRCC is active in formulating SAR agreements, plans and policy for the inland area.

AFRCC functions around the clock and is manned by people trained and experienced to coordinate search and rescue operations. The center is equipped with extensive audio and digital communications equipment. A comprehensive resource file in the center lists federal, state, local and volunteer organizations which conduct or assist SAR efforts. In addition, the center maintains rosters of Canadian and Mexican SAR coordinating agencies.

The AFRCC will accept and act on initial notifications from any person or agency and will attempt to determine the urgency and the facts pertaining to the situation. When the AFRCC receives a call it is treated as an actual distress situation until proven otherwise. As the incident is investigated, a number of criteria are evaluated and include such considerations as the following:

STATE SAR AGREEMENTS: Each state has a search and rescue agreement on file in the AFRCC that delineates the responsible agency and coordinating requirements for the various types of SAR missions. Each request for federal SAR assistance is evaluated to ensure these requirements are met.

POSSE COMITATUS ACT: Title 18 USC 1385 prohibits military participation in civil law enforcement activities. Although there are some exceptions to this prohibition, Department of Defense forces (including Civil Air Patrol) will be restricted from participating in searches with law enforcement nexus, i.e. fugitives and kidnappings

MEDICAL EVALUATION: The medical condition of the victim is the most important aspect of mission consideration. If the requester has a physician available, this physician's opinions are weighed heavily before opening a mission. In those incidents where a medical evaluation is not available, a flight surgeon is on call who is experienced in the effects of altitude on the victim. A mission will be initiated in those instances to only prevent death or the aggravation of a serious injury or illness.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST: On MEDEVAC or mercy missions when the patient is not eligible for DOD medical benefits, federal assets (as a general rule) cannot be used when commercial resources are available. Even though a patient may not have the required financial support, commercial resources will be provided the opportunity to accept the mission. Federal resources will be considered only after appropriate civil resources have been checked for availability.

RESOURCE AVAILABILITY: Although any SAR capable asset belonging to the federal government may be requested, each resource is evaluated with consideration for the distance from the distress, special equipment requirements, terrain factors, and urgency of the situation.

URGENCY OF SITUATION:

A request for resources will be considered valid only when there is an immediate threat to life, limb, or sight.



SAR OPERATIONS

Once the use of federal resources is authorized, a mission number is assigned and SAR forces are selected based on the geographical location and mission requirements. The AFRCC coordinates closely with the responsible agency in an attempt to provide resources best suited to accomplish the mission.

While the mission is in progress the AFRCC monitors all activity. Participating agencies are requested to keep the AFRCC informed of their past, present, and planned action. This information is coordinated with the on-scene mission coordinator and is compiled for future reporting requirements. Because the mission is re-evaluated as new developments occur, continual and clear coordination between all agencies is paramount.

TYPES OF MISSIONS

SEARCH: Once a distress situation is determined to exist but a location is unknown, federal SAR forces may be activated to search for, locate, and relieve the distress situation. The objective of these searches may take the form of overdue aircraft, emergency locator transmitters (ELTs), hunters, hikers, or children.

RESCUE: This type of mission entails the use of federal SAR forces to recover persons in distress whose location in a remote area is known but assistance is required. This may be in the form of transportation to safety or to an adequate medical facility. These requests are normally received by the AFRCC from park service personnel or the local law enforcement authority.

MEDEVAC: The transportation by federal assets of persons from one medical facility to another is defined as aero medical evacuation (MEDEVAC). Requests are normally received from a local hospital when no commercial transportation is available, the person's life is in jeopardy, and time is critical. Each request is evaluated and the decision to use federal resources weighs heavily on the attending physician's medical opinion.

MERCY: A mission to transport blood, organs, serum, medical equipment/personnel, etc to relieve a specific time-critical, life threatening situation is referred to as a mercy mission. Requests are normally referred from a local hospital authority or, in some cases, the American Red Cross when commercial transportation is not available.