

Maryland Wing Responds to Hurricane Irene



Members Engaged in Damage Assessment

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8/29/2011—MIDDLE RIVER, Md.—Fifty-five members of the Maryland Wing of the Civil Air Patrol were mobilized to support damage assessments in the wake of Hurricane Irene's passage. Two CAP aircraft and 14 ground teams comprised of both cadets and senior members, surveyed 65 areas throughout eastern Maryland.

These damage assessments, which began at 7:30 a.m. yesterday, were conducted at the request of the Maryland Emergency Management Agency. Once weather conditions cleared in the western part of the state, CAP pilots and air crews took to the skies to snap high-resolution pictures of flooding and property damage. All photos were sent to the Maryland Joint Operations Center to be used for post-storm assessment.

Maj. Christopher Howell, the CAP Incident Commander on duty during yesterday's assessments, noted that the damage was lighter than expected in some areas. "Maryland Wing is proud to partner with the Maryland Emergency Management Agency and help support the citizens of Maryland," said Maj. Howell.

Maryland Wing began preparations for Hurricane Irene on Thursday, Aug. 25, by moving aircraft out of the path of the storm and alerting members to prepare for ground team, aircrew and mission base tasking. CAP liaison officers were integrated into MEMA's Maryland Joint Operations Center beginning on Saturday, Aug. 27. CAP's Incident Command at Martin State Airport began operations yesterday, conducting damage assessment operations once the hurricane had passed.

"Our whole process is based on pre-planning," explained Col. Gerard Weiss, the ICP's planning section chief. We have standard operational plans ready to go for scenarios such as search and rescue, disaster relief, and safeguarding the wing's aircraft during a hurricane. As events unfold, these plans are activated and the wing springs into action.

Early this June, Maryland Wing had the opportunity to practice responding to a very similar scenario during the biennial evaluation of the wing's capability to safely and effectively execute the Air Force's non-combat search and rescue mission. The scenario for this year's evaluation, for which Maryland Wing received the top rating of highly successful, was a simulated hurricane that caused extensive damage when it made landfall in Maryland. As part of the exercise, Maryland Wing responded to simulated tasking from MEMA by conducting actual air and ground sorties to assess notional damage. "We practiced activating our operational plans, and we used the same procedures," said Weiss, who also served as an incident commander during the exercise.

Civil Air Patrol, the official auxiliary of the U.S. Air Force, is a nonprofit organization with more than 61,000 members nationwide. CAP, in its Air Force auxiliary role, performs 90 percent of continental U.S. inland search and rescue missions as tasked by the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center and was credited by the AFRCC with saving 113 lives in fiscal year 2010. Its volunteers also perform homeland security, disaster relief and drug interdiction missions at the request of federal, state and local agencies. The members play a leading role in aerospace education and serve as mentors to the more than 26,000 young people currently participating in CAP cadet programs. CAP has been performing missions for America for nearly 70 years. It is a major partner of Wreaths Across America, an initiative to remember, honor and teach about the sacrifices of U.S. military veterans. For more information on Civil Air Patrol, visit www.gocivilairpatrol.com or www.capvolunteernow.com.

More than 1,500 members of CAP serve in Maryland. Last fiscal year wing members flew 42 search and rescue missions and were credited with 31 finds. For more information, visit www.mdcap.org.