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## **Air Force Auxiliary ready to participate in national exercise to test earthquake response plan**

**MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, Ala.** – Civil Air Patrol, the U.S. Air Force auxiliary, will participate in Ardent Sentry, a major homeland security and disaster response exercise beginning May 16 that tests emergency responders' ability to handle a massive earthquake in America's Midwest, along the seismic-sensitive New Madrid fault.

"CAP is a nationwide organization with a tremendous amount of resources it can provide to the nation in a disaster, no matter how large," said Col. James Rushing, CAP's Southeast Region commander, who is the senior agency liaison for this year's four-day exercise, coordinating CAP operations with other agencies. He performed a similar role during the Deepwater Horizon oil spill response in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010.

"CAP has 550 aerial reconnaissance and transportation aircraft and almost a thousand vehicles that are ideally suited for this type of mission," said Rushing. "In addition, the organization has hundreds of highly trained aircrews, ground team members and emergency operations personnel who are fully qualified in the same National Incident Management System (NIMS) training that federal, state and local officials require."

The Air Force auxiliary also has a nationwide communications network of high frequency and very high frequency interoperable radios for Ardent Sentry, which will involve emergency responders in six states testing the National New Madrid Fault Response Plan. "These communications assets are ideal on a disaster scenario like an earthquake or hurricane because they are infrastructure-independent, which means they do not rely on cell towers or a satellite network that can easily get overloaded," said Rushing.

Though not typically associated with major earthquakes, the New Madrid fault is home to one of the nation's more active seismic zones, stretching 150 miles across Illinois, Missouri, Arkansas, Tennessee and Kentucky. Earthquakes there can also affect Mississippi and Indiana.

The region's last massive quakes, ranging from magnitude 7.0 to 8.6, hit in 1811 and 1812 and literally created new geographical features in the region. But on the 200th anniversary of those quakes, the concern is that the area along the New Madrid fault, now far more populated and developed, may be unprepared.

That's where the National New Madrid Fault Response Plan will be tested this year in the course of the annual Ardent Sentry exercise. The exercise will help make sure the proper systems are in place and working before such a natural disaster might occur.

The national exercise includes a number of federal, state and local agencies and a large contingent of CAP members. As many as 36 CAP planes and aircrews will be involved, said Rushing, who will be joined by members from six wings — Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, Arkansas, Tennessee and Kentucky — from four CAP regions. The New Madrid plan also includes support from the Alabama, Georgia, Iowa, Louisiana, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina and Texas wings.

All CAP wings have agreements with their state governments to respond in the event of earthquakes measuring at least magnitude 6.0 by assisting with initial disaster assessments and gathering information for governors who may be requesting a Presidential Disaster Declaration.

CAP's primary role in Ardent Sentry will be providing aerial reconnaissance for photography and assessment of damage and conditions on the ground. "To work through a scenario like this gives us a better feel for what we really need to do when the real event happens," Rushing said.

Exercises like Ardent Sentry help responders work out any kinks before major disasters. Lessons learned from last year's Gulf oil spill response efforts were implemented in this exercise and other emergency response plans, Rushing noted.

Though similar exercises have been conducted for the last two decades to prepare for any repeat of the 1811-1812 New Madrid quakes, new concepts and technologies are constantly emerging and must be factored into recovery efforts and operations. This time, aerial photography systems like CAP's Airborne Real-time Cueing Hyperspectral Enhanced Reconnaissance (ARCHER), as well as full-motion video provided by the organization's new Geospatial Information Interoperability Exploitation Portable (GIIEP) Go-Kits, will be used for damage assessment.

*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 69 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](http://www.gocivilairpatrol.com) or [www.capvolunteernow.com](http://www.capvolunteernow.com).*