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U.S. hurricane forecasters embark on preparedness mission to Mexico and Caribbean
Public invited to tour U.S. Air Force Reserve 'Hurricane Hunter' aircraft

The 2016 hurricane season is fast approaching and to help communities in Mexico and the Caribbean get prepared for the season and weather the storm, NOAA and the U.S. Air Force Reserve will host a series of events, including tours aboard a hurricane hunter aircraft.

NOAA hurricane specialists, including National Hurricane Center director Rick Knabb, Ph.D., will provide information to residents of vulnerable communities about hurricane preparedness and resilience. Tours of the Air Force Reserve Command's WC-130J "Hurricane Hunter" will offer an opportunity to learn how scientists collect hurricane information.

"Hurricanes are part of life in the United States, Mexico, and throughout the Caribbean. This tour brings us together as we spread the word about taking steps now to be ready, long before the next hurricane strikes," said Knabb. "All of the technologies we apply to making the best possible forecasts do not matter if communities, families, and individuals do not prepare far in advance."

During hurricanes, military air crews fly 10 state-of-the-art WC-130J aircraft directly into the core of tropical cyclones to gather data that are critical for forecasting a hurricane's intensity and landfall. The data are sent in real time via satellite from the aircraft directly to the National Hurricane Center for analysis and use by hurricane forecasters.

"2016 marks the 73rd year the Air Force Reserve Command's 53d WRS has supported the National Hurricane Center and United States Hurricane Warning Program and helped mitigate the hurricane threat within the Atlantic basin," said Lt Col Jon Talbot, 53rd WRS chief meteorologist.

During the 2015 hurricane season, the 53rd WRS flew 75 missions, including 38 investigative flights over the Atlantic, for the National Hurricane Center. It also flew seven missions over the eastern North Pacific and 30 over the central North Pacific. The eastern North Pacific hurricane season begins May 15 while the central North Pacific and Atlantic basin hurricane season begins June 1.

Locations and times for public tours are listed below (all times are local):

- April 11, 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. – Cabo San Lucas, Mexico
- April 12, 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. – Puerto Vallarta, Mexico
- April 13, 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. – Tegucigalpa, Honduras
- April 15, 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. – Tortola, British Virgin Islands
- April 16, 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. – Ponce, Puerto Rico

Aside from Knabb, participants in the tour include:

- Lixion Avila, Ph.D., NOAA NHC senior hurricane specialist;
- Gladys Rubio, NOAA NHC Tropical Analysis and Forecast Branch meteorologist;

- U.S Air Force reservists from the 53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron (WRS), 403rd Wing, Keesler Air Force Base, Biloxi, Miss.

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