



HEADQUARTERS IDAHO WING  
CIVIL AIR PATROL  
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE AUXILIARY  
1050 Airport Road  
Burley, Idaho 83318



## ALERTING AND USING CIVIL AIR PATROL A Guide for Local Governments

### OVERVIEW

The Idaho Wing of the Civil Air Patrol (CAP) is an all-volunteer organization that provides single engine aircraft, such as the Cessna 182, for search for missing persons, transport of emergency essential personnel and equipment, disaster related damage assessment, general area search for survivors, and emergency communications support, as well as ground team capability to aid local governments in conducting search and rescue (SAR), disaster relief (DR), and other emergency services activities. Our most common request for CAP is for aircraft and aircrews to support local searches for missing persons. In order to obtain CAP assistance, some restraints and procedural activities must be considered.

Search/Disaster managers should recognize that a fixed-wing airplane is one of many tools that can be employed for an effective search. They have limitations due to weather, terrain, and altitude; but in most cases, their potential benefit as a component of an aggressive search effort outweighs their limitations. The CAP provides nationwide search capability with trained aircrews and ground teams, and they generally come at no cost to the requesting agency.

When requested for SAR, CAP assumes a quasi-federal role in support of the U.S. Air Force. CAP's mission authorization and activity is under the direct control of the USAF. For Search and Rescue, the USAF Rescue Coordination Center located at Tyndall AFB, Florida (the AFRCC as it is commonly known) at **800-851-3051**. A SAR Controller will request information, including some or all of the items listed below. If approved, the AFRCC provides CAP with a "mission number", which serves as an authorization to initiate CAP support of local governments. This authorization allows for limited reimbursement of fuel and maintenance expenses, as well as providing insurance coverage for the CAP volunteers.

To obtain the services of CAP for a disaster relief (DR) or major emergency, contact the Idaho Bureau of Homeland Security in accordance with the county or city disaster or emergency plan. Idaho BHS will initiate the process for contacting and employing CAP.

The process by which mission authorization is obtained contains several checks and balances designed to protect both the government and the volunteers involved.

INTEGRITY

VOLUNTEER SERVICE

EXCELLENCE

RESPECT

## INITIATING A REQUEST

SAR requests for CAP support must come from a duly authorized representative of a government agency that is managing the search activity. Under Idaho Code, section 46-1009(6)(a), the county Sheriff is responsible for coordination of search and rescue missions within his/her jurisdiction, so the request normally originates from a Sheriff's office. The AFRCC expects to speak directly to a Sheriff's officer, sergeant, or a deputy to obtain information regarding the requested search. In a pinch, a dispatcher can provide some information, but as a general rule – the more senior and informed the requestor is, the better the request process will flow.

In general the Sheriff's Office should be able to provide the following information when requesting a mission number for CAP assistance from AFRCC:

1. General circumstances that require a search
2. Area to be searched
3. Type of terrain to be searched, including elevation of the area
4. Name of missing person(s)/number of people missing
5. If possible, description of the person (age, sex, clothing worn, etc.)
6. Any special problems such as health/medication, physical/mental handicaps.
7. How long has the person been missing?
8. Where were they last seen?
9. Are they on foot, in a vehicle, in a boat?
10. Any special circumstances that may be applicable to the search

The AFRCC Controller will act as if the jurisdiction has used all available resources. In general, the answer should be **"YES"**. There is no expectation that all funds be spent, for example extraordinary expenditures for renting commercial airplanes or helicopters. It only means that all appropriate physical resources that would be applicable for the search have been activated. The AFRCC will initiate calls to the Idaho CAP contact personnel to begin the process of getting resources. CAP will provide an Incident Commander who will contact the requesting agency, e.g., the Sheriff's Office to begin collecting additional information regarding the specifics of the request and the area to be searched.

If the requestor is a member of a county search and rescue team, it is important that he/she have the full authority of the Sheriff to request CAP or other resources. If deputized, the requestor should use the term "Deputy" when communicating with the AFRCC. This satisfies the USAF requirement that CAP be committed to support legally constituted local government agencies conducting the search.

The person requesting CAP does not have to be the Incident Commander (IC), Incident Manager (IM), or an On-Scene Commander (OSC). However, it works better if someone such as the IC/IM/OSC, using an operational title, serves as the principle point of contact with the AFRCC. When CAP is authorized and becomes part of the SAR/DR, they report to the person in charge of the operation or their designee. In many cases, this is a volunteer with the local SAR organization or county Emergency Management Director.

The lead-time required to get an airplane over the search area is generally one hour, plus flying time. This will depend on time of day or night, weather conditions, and other factors. Flights over the area at night can be extremely beneficial if the victim is actively attempting to get your attention. The IC should make the request, and if the aircraft can perform the mission – fine. If not, at least it will be ready to go at daylight. “Safety of flight” is always the final factor in the IC and pilot’s mind, so weather, terrain, and time factors must be weighed in their mission planning efforts.

The AFRCC will only authorize CAP missions when there is a possibility that the missing subject is alive. This is a common problem when a drowning is suspected. It is important that the sheriff’s office provide the right information to the AFRCC if you want to initiate a search for someone missing on a waterway. If you have an overturned boat, a witness report of someone being swept downstream, or similar circumstances – then there is a chance of survival and a CAP request will likely be approved. However, if the scene is a lake and the witness reported exactly where the victim went down and did not re-surface, then it is unlikely that CAP resources will be approved. In other words, **if you initiate the request with an indication that you are looking for a body, the AFRCC cannot approve CAP involvement.**

CAP cannot be employed when there is criminal activity involved. For example, we cannot search for a fugitive that is being sought in connection with a crime.

## **EMPLOYMENT**

One of the biggest problems in using aircraft to assist ground teams is with the ability to communicate from ground-to-air. This issue needs to be addressed during the first communication with the CAP IC or CAP aircrew that will be supporting the search. CAP needs to have specific operational assignments as to what areas are to be searched, and should also know if there are persons other than the victims in those areas. From the air, a person is a person, and it’s hard to tell if they are a victim or a searcher.

CAP has air-ground radio capability in the back country by the use of a communications plane called “High Bird”. CAP has several fixed location and portable VHF repeaters in Idaho that can be used in a similar fashion. The CAP IC may also dispatch one of our vehicles to the local Incident Command Post to assist with communication and coordination.

The Civil Air Patrol exists because the volunteers want to serve their community and fellow man. They possess unique training and expertise in aerial search that makes them a valuable resource for ground based search organizations. It’s worth the time to make the calls and bring their resources to bear on your search problem.