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Civil Air Patrol gives a heads-up on training

Small planes overhead are no cause for alarm

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Houstonians may notice a few small red, white and blue airplanes buzzing overhead this weekend as an auxiliary military group performs training exercises in the skies above the city.

Through a series of simulated emergency search-and-rescue and disaster-relief scenarios, the Civil Air Patrol will train volunteer members at the West Houston Airport, starting today and running through the weekend.

The group provided support during Hurricane Ike and will be practicing similar exercises, including search and rescue, aerial photography and evacuation route surveying, according to CAP spokesman Robert Brecount.

"The airplanes are provided by the Air Force, and we assume the maintenance and operation," Brecount said. "So, it's a wonderful trade-off between country and these volunteers."

About 30 volunteers are expected to participate in one- to two-hour missions to fly single-engine planes over Houston and the surrounding community, as far as Galveston and over the Houston Ship Channel.

"There's no cause for alarm; there's no danger,"

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Brecount said, urging the public not to worry when they see the airplanes. "These people are very highly trained."

The nonprofit organization, founded in 1941, 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 72 lives in fiscal year 2009, according to Brecount.

Practice searches will be conducted from the air and on the ground, and may run into the late evening.

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