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AFRCC dispatches helos to missing hiker on Mount St. Helens

TYNDALL AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. – The Air Force Rescue Coordination Center here is working with officials from Washington State to locate a missing hiker who fell an estimated 1,500 feet while climbing the 8,364-foot mountain Monday.

At approximately 6:30 p.m. Eastern Time Monday, the Washington State Emergency Management Department contacted controllers at AFRCC to assist the Skamania County Sheriff's Office in their search for the 52-year old climber who had reportedly fallen from a nearly-vertical crater wall of the mountain. AFRCC contacted Coast Guard Station Astoria, who launched an HH-60 Jayhawk helicopter at 7:45 p.m. to the area where the hiker was thought to have fallen.



An additional search and rescue SH-60 Seahawk helicopter was deployed from Naval Air Station Whidbey Island in Oak Harbor, Wash. Due to high winds and significant downdraft near the site, both helicopters returned to base before midnight.

“Once daylight occurred, we again contacted NAS Whidbey Island to send out another SH-60 to the scene,” said Senior Master Sgt. John Mullally, an AFRCC controller at Tyndall AFB. “We’ve been working closely with law enforcement on the ground as well as Washington’s emergency management first responders to do what we can to rescue the missing climber. We have put the best and most qualified SAR assets we have on the job so we can bring this man home to his family and friends.”

As the United States' inland search and rescue mission coordinator, the AFRCC serves as the single agency responsible for coordinating federal SAR activities in the 48 contiguous United States.

The rescue coordination center directly ties into the FAA's alerting system and the U.S. Mission Control Center. In addition to Search and Rescue Satellite Aided Tracking information, the AFRCC computer system contains resource files that list federal and state organizations which can conduct or assist in SAR efforts throughout North America.