Upgraded Lockheed Martin WC-130J 'Weatherbirds' Will Improve Hurricane Hunting With More Precise Wind Speed Measurements

Lockheed Martin is in the process of installing a new system on WC-130J "Hurricane Hunter" aircraft that will greatly enhance the accuracy of data collected during storm tracking missions. The system, called a Stepped Frequency Microwave Radiometer (SFMR), will accurately measure wind speed and rainfall at sea level, enabling more precise forecasting of the severity and direction of storms.

Currently the National Hurricane Center (NHC) uses a mathematical formula to create estimates of surface winds. With the new SFMR system, surface winds will be accurately measured.

"The WC-130J SFMR-equipped aircraft will provide the NHC with a higher level of confidence in how fast the wind is blowing at the surface of the water, thereby enhancing the ability to issue more accurate watches and warnings," said Lt. Col. Roy Deatherage of the 53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron. "The NHC is very excited about this new system because it will provide uninterrupted surface wind data throughout the entire mission."

The U.S. Air Force 53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron, the "Hurricane Hunters," operates 10 WC-130Js from Biloxi AFB, Miss. The 53rd WRS has been flying WC-130Js since September 2005. Although the squadron had to move its operations to Dobbins Air Reserve Base, Ga., when hurricane Katrina struck the gulf coast, it did not miss a single mission tasking due to the storm.

Headquartered in Bethesda, Md., Lockheed Martin employs about 140,000 people worldwide and is principally engaged in the research, design, development, manufacture, integration and sustainment of advanced technology systems, products and services. The corporation reported 2006 sales of $39.6 billion.

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