



NRO Key To Acquisition of Hazard Support System

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The National Reconnaissance Office (NRO) led the acquisition of the Hazard Support System, which will be used to warn of the outbreak of wildfires and volcanic eruptions. It is a joint program between the Department of Defense, United States Geological Survey (USGS), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and other government agencies.

The NRO was asked to take the lead in the system because of its expertise in the acquisition, integration and development of satellite-related systems. The Hazard Support System will use ballistic missile warning satellites, civil weather and environmental satellites and other sensors to continuously monitor the United States and its territories to detect wildland fires and the entire globe for volcanic activity. It can also track the movement of volcanic ash clouds which impact aviation.

The program is the collaborative effort of more than a dozen government agencies and its prototype should be ready to test this summer. Full operations would start in 1999. It could save the United States millions of dollars annually in fire losses and fire-suppression costs, can reduce the number of lives endangered, and can provide early warning to avert a potential volcanic catastrophe.

The Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Space spearheaded an interagency effort to field the prototype system, which will be operated by the USGS. The initial prototype of the system cost \$23.6 million and is being developed over two years. The development contract was won by a Raytheon-led team that includes the Harris Corporation and Ball Aerospace.

The Hazard Support System center will be in Reston, VA., at the USGS. The center will receive information from the various satellite systems which will be fused and correlated in real-time with other data, such as nationwide lightning-strike events, Doppler weather radar, fire potential indicators and wind data. Detections of fires, volcanic eruptions and ash clouds will be reported electronically to the federal agencies responsible for warning of these disasters.