

Air Station Kodiak Preparing For Return to Arctic

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Jay Barrett/KMXT

The United

States Coast Guard has begun gearing up for another summer of incursions into the high arctic. C-130 Hercules flights from Air Station Kodiak will resume later this month, as part of Operation Arctic Domain Awareness, and will continue about every two weeks through the fall.

Rear

Admiral Gene Brooks, commander of the Coast Guard's 17th District in Juneau, says the missions have a Homeland Security aspect, determining what risks certain vessels pose to the maritime community and infrastructure, the arctic environment and Native villages.

The Arctic

Domain flights resume on March 17th.

The

missions will continue to test the Coast Guard's capabilities in the arctic environment, survey sea ice and monitor vessel traffic.

One issue

discovered during last summer's initial Arctic Awareness flights, Brooks said, was that pieces of ice about the size of a sedan were missed by Coast Guard radar. While they pose no danger to icebreakers and other ice-strengthened vessels, they present a significant hazard for other ships, including non-icebreaker Coast Guard vessels. He said six ships were observed endangered by late-summer sea ice west Barrow last year.

Last year

the surveillance flights spotted 20 commercial vessels transiting the Arctic Ocean from Northwest Alaska to Western Arctic Canada, and saw 10 small personal watercraft up to 90 miles from shore carrying hunting parties, but no personal protective gear.

Brooks said

that because the C-130s have plenty of room on board, the flights often carry scientists, other government representatives and, occasionally, the media.

