

Davis-Monthan Air Force Base

Noise FAQ



Why do I hear aircraft noise near D-M?

Davis-Monthan Air Force Base operates the busiest single runway and executes the largest flying hour program in Air Combat Command. The primary Air Force aircraft flying out of D-M are the A-10C Thunderbolt II, EC-130H Compass Call, HC-130J Combat King II and HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopter. Also operating out of D-M, is the 162nd Wing's alert detachment and the U.S. Customs and Border Protection agency. The 162nd Wing employs F-16 Fighting Falcons while CBP operates Cessnas, and UH-60 Black Hawk and A-Star helicopters. The base also hosts visiting units and various Department of Defense aircraft which arrive at D-M for storage or depot maintenance at the 309th Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Group.

Where do aircraft from D-M fly?

The majority of the aircraft departing and arriving at D-M train at the Barry M. Goldwater Range, located west of Tucson. There are also numerous Military Operations Areas (MOAs) surrounding the region which offer unique and diverse training opportunities. Additionally, our pilots regularly conduct currency training and evaluations at Libby Army Airfield at Fort Huachuca. Currency training is mandated by the Air Force to keep our pilots proficient. In fact, D-M pilots fly the majority of their practice approaches at other airfields to limit the impact on the residents of Tucson.



Why do aircraft from D-M have to fly over Tucson?



D-M operates a single runway. The direction in which aircraft take off and land is dictated by wind direction, and whether or not air traffic from D-M will conflict with Tucson International Airport. All flight patterns are dictated by the alignment of D-M's runway and tailored to safety and operational standards set by the Air Force and Federal Aviation Administration, which necessitate flying north of Tucson.

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What is the base doing to minimize the impact of noise on surrounding communities?

D-M's arrival and departure procedures are coordinated with the Federal Aviation Administration and are managed alongside Tucson International Airport's arrival and departure procedures. To the maximum extent possible, Air Force pilots follow noise abatement procedures specifically developed to address community concerns. In order to minimize the aircraft noise experienced by our neighbors, our pilots maintain a higher altitude than required by FAA regulations. During night operations, aircraft will depart to the south and land from the south, unless operational, safety or weather conditions dictate otherwise. The base also observes quiet hours from 10:30 PM until 6:00 AM. Although uncommon, military flights can be approved to fly during quiet hours. Approval usually depends on whether or not the mission fulfills specific training requirements. The Air National Guard F-16 Alert Detachment and the Customs and Border Protection maintain a 24/7 operational readiness posture and fly during quiet hours as dictated by their mission.



What role does weather play during takeoffs and landings? How does weather impact aircraft noise?

Weather can change the various procedures and flying options for the local air traffic pattern. For example, a tailwind exceeding 10 knots will require the takeoff direction to switch to the northwest. Monsoons and low cloud cover can also trap and amplify sounds created by aircraft operating near the base.

How low are D-M aircraft allowed to fly?



D-M's flying squadrons comply with all Air Force and Federal Aviation Administration Regulations, as well as D-M-specific flying procedures designed to help minimize noise impacts on surrounding communities. While in transit over congested, populated areas our fixed-wing aircraft do not fly lower than 1,000 feet and our helicopters do not fly lower than 500 feet unless they are taking off, landing, or if there is an emergency.

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Why do I see aircraft flying at night?

D-M pilots and crews are required to train at night to maintain readiness and all-weather capabilities. The squadrons limit their night operations to what is required to remain proficient in night flying training. We train the way we fight.



Why do we see visiting aircraft at the base?

D-M is an ideal location for visiting aircraft because of its optimal weather, vast surrounding airspace available to military training activities and its similarity to the high desert environments of many U.S. forward deployed locations. The support infrastructure at D-M, in addition to the base's proximity to the Barry M. Goldwater Range, Outlaw/Jackal MOAs and the Tombstone MOA, further contribute to the ideal nature of this location.

When do the jets use afterburners?



As part of noise abatement procedures, jets ordinarily do not use their afterburners when flying over the city of Tucson. However, Operation Noble Eagle is the one exception. Arizona Air National Guard F-16s are on alert 24/7 at D-M in support of U.S. Northern Command. They can, and do take off at a moment's notice to ensure aerospace control over more than 225,000 square miles, covering six southwestern states. Speed is critical to this mission, necessitating the use of maximum power. These aircraft always take off to the north and execute a rapid climb to altitude for noise abatement. This has been a mission at D-M following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. D-M recognizes the impact and unpredictable nature of this mission, but the preservation of our air sovereignty is one way the DoD has been tasked to support national security.

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Why do I hear loud sirens and voice announcements coming from the base?



During real-world and base-wide exercises, sirens and voice announcements are played over the installation's intercom system which can sometimes be heard off base. These announcements are necessary to inform D-M personnel about what is going on and how to react. Prior to all major exercises, the public affairs office will send out a press release via the base website to inform the community of the upcoming exercise.

What are these booms I'm hearing in the area?

The primary aircraft based at D-M (A-10, C-130, HH-60) are incapable of flying supersonic speeds and cannot generate sonic booms. Any jet aircraft that are capable can only fly supersonic in designated military operations areas. Residents living to the south of the base, primarily the Rita Ranch area, occasionally hear booms and gun fire because our explosive ordnance disposal unit utilizes a range on the southeast side of the base. We also have tactical firing ranges used by D-M and other local law enforcement personnel for weapon qualifications, as well as a skeet range for recreational activities. These ranges are used throughout the day, including mornings nights and weekends.



Why are there F-35s flying around?



Aside from the F-35s which fly here for the annual Heritage Flight Training and Certification Course. All other F-35s seen in the Tucson area are typically transient overflight aircraft and are not landing at or taking off from D-M, except in the event of a diversion due to weather or in flight emergency. Under the guidance and clearance of the FAA's Tucson Air Traffic Control, transient military aircraft are permitted to accomplish practice approaches at D-M for proficiency training purposes. After completing their practice approaches, the aircraft leave D-M's airspace.