



GROUP 6
CALIFORNIA WING - CIVIL AIR PATROL

Aircrew Safety Briefing

"Avoiding Mid-Air Collisions in R-2508"

Our California desert skies offer some of the best flying weather in the country over relatively unpopulated areas. That is precisely why the Air Force, Army, Navy, NASA, California ANG, and civilian test pilot schools and aircraft developers are located in or near R-2508 and use this airspace heavily.

R- 2508 is the largest special use airspace in the U.S., covering nearly 16,000 square miles. However, Mach II (or more!) aircraft capable of operating from dirt to 50,000 feet+ with climb rates well in excess of 20,000 feet per minute “eats up” available airspace at an astounding rate. Furthermore, military pilots rarely train alone. There will usually be 1 to 3 wingmen and there may be multiple “adversary” aircraft also. Test aircraft will usually have 1 to 2 chase aircraft in formation with them carefully observing their performance.

The Air Force is now doing Predator (UAV) pilot training at El Mirage dry lake which is just south of R-2508 right where the civilian traffic is flying to avoid the restricted space. The pilotless aircraft do have transponders on so the FAA can see them, but they are quite small and, just like sailplanes, will be very hard to see unless they are in a turn. They do fly around 100 KTAS and most of their operations will be below 4,000' MSL. To make things even more interesting, live firing with missiles and guns does occur at various locations within the R-2508 complex.

There are many VR and IR routes depicted on our sectional charts and these do get regular use by the military. Be aware that routes do extend beyond the restricted area into the adjacent MOAs. Try to transit low level routes at 2,000 AGL and above and you should be clear of the low level traffic. CAUTION! The low level routes used by Edwards AFB operations may not be depicted on your chart. Take extreme caution in the MOAs just west of R-2508 when refueling operations are occurring. The tanker will be on a north-south track at 15,000' MSL. However, you must be wary because the aircraft in the process of rendezvousing with the tanker will be coming up from below, paying full attention to joining with the tanker, and can potentially be at any altitude below 15,000'.

So, how can the civilian pilot safely fly in R-2508? You can fly through this special use airspace safely provided that you flight plan diligently, obtain permission to enter, and fly “squawking and talking.”

Restricted areas are areas where extreme hazards exist (i.e., aerial gunnery, live missile firing, artillery firing, fighter training, etc). These areas are ALWAYS considered active (hot) unless the airspace is released by the controlling agency. These areas are more likely to be cold on the weekends. Always call Flight Service to get the relevant NOTAMS for the area. In addition, call the Central Coordinating Facility at Edwards AFB 0600-1800, M-F, at (661)277-2508. They will inform you which areas are hot or cold. If you are already airborne (or on the weekends) contact Joshua Approach Control (check your chart for the appropriate frequency for your sector). Joshua should be able to give you airspace status as well as VFR traffic advisories. Do plan your flight thoroughly, study the sectional before you take off, squawk the assigned Mode C code, and fly with all your external lights on. Be sure to fly the correct hemispheric altitudes and maintain a vigilant outlook for military and civilian aircraft. If you do spot another aircraft with a conflicting flight path, pulling up is your quickest way to change your flight path. If time permits turn toward the other aircraft to keep them in sight and to accelerate their drift across your windscreen. Always remember that the hardest aircraft to see is the one on a collision course with you because it will not be moving on your windscreen at all. Use all crew members to improve lookout. With preparation, permission, and vigilance, you can safely fly the skies of R-2508.

(Note to all Group 6 personnel: Neither the Aircrew Briefing nor the 60-Second Safety Advisor are meant to be top-down only. Comments, criticisms, suggestions and contributions are welcome and may be incorporated into future issues. Send comments to cbagdikian@bakersfield.com.)

