Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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************************PHOTO/MEDIA OPPORTUNITY*********************

WHO: Scientists from National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies

WHAT: Launch of Weather Balloon to Track Tropical Storm in Pacific Ocean

WHEN: Thursday, Oct. 15, at 3:30 p.m.

WHERE: Outside the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

HRI Launches Balloons to Track Pacific Ocean Typhoon As Part of Program to More Accurately Predict Hurricanes

CORPUS CHRISTI, Texas – Researchers from the Northern Gulf Institute and the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies (HRI) will launch the second of two balloons to track Tropical Storm Patricia as it moves across the Pacific Ocean, on Thursday, Oct. 15, at 3:30 p.m. on the lawn adjacent to the HRI on the Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi campus.

With NOAA and the Northern Gulf Institute, the HRI is working on a new program that incorporates the latest in tracking balloon technology. Called "precision release," it more accurately monitors wind movements in advance of hurricanes. The launch is part of the driftsonde balloon program to provide forecasters with better data to reduce the "cone of uncertainty" of tracking models when predicting and where hurricanes will hit the coast.

"This will save lives and property along the Gulf coast," said HRI Director Larry McKinney. "The data collection is very important to hurricane modelers seeking

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improved statistics to track the storms and their intensity. With the super-pressure balloons, dozens, if not hundreds, can be deployed to saturate the hurricane environment with measurements to improve hurricane track forecasts to provide data in regions the traditional reconnaissance data can't measure because of safety constraints."

The driftsondes will provide unique data on the conditions that lead to Atlantic hurricanes. They float at a speed close to the movement of the easterly waves, so we can monitor them from their earliest stages. Each driftsonde had to be robust enough to endure days of extreme stratospheric cold (averaging minus-80 degrees Fahrenheit) as well as the intense sunlight of the high, thin atmosphere.

For the balloon deployment to be affordable and practical, the system also required low-cost, lightweight, off-the-shelf instruments capable of operating reliably in low pressure and in temperature extremes with very low power. Because of their flexible and relatively inexpensive nature, scientists believe, driftsondes may soon become a popular way to monitor and study many types of weather across the world's oceans and other remote regions.

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