Tracking Santa: Follow the Bearded Man on Your Smartphone

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PETERSON AIR FORCE BASE, Colo. (AP) — For kids who can't wait for Santa to arrive, the North American Aerospace Defense Command has a Christmas treat. Visions of sugar plums can be augmented by a check on the fat man's progress around the globe on Christmas Eve. Here are five things to know about the holiday tradition called NORAD Tracks Santa:

1. HOW DO YOU FOLLOW SANTA'S PATH?

NORAD provides updates by phone, Facebook, Twitter and email. If you call 877-HI-NORAD, a live person will give you an update. Online: http://www.noradsanta.org . Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/noradsanta . Twitter: @NoradSanta. Email: noradtrackssanta@outlook.com. Smartphone apps are also available at app stores. NORAD's Santa operations center opens at 6 a.m. ET on Dec. 24. NORAD says Santa usually starts in the South Pacific and hits New Zealand and Australia before heading to Japan and Asia. Africa and Europe are next, followed by North America and South America. "Santa calls the shots," NORAD says on its website. "We just track him!"

2. HOW MANY PEOPLE FOLLOW SANTA?

Last year, volunteers answered 114,000 phone calls from around the world. The website had 22.3 million unique visitors. NORAD Tracks Santa had 1.2 million followers on Facebook and 129,000 on Twitter.

3. WHY DOES NORAD DO IT?

In 1955, a local newspaper advertisement invited children to call Santa but mistakenly listed the hotline or NORAD's predecessor. Rather than disappoint the kids, commanders told them they indeed knew where Santa was. NORAD, a U.S.-Canadian operation based at Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado Springs, Colo., continues the tradition every Christmas Eve.

4. WHY WAS THERE CONTROVERSY THIS YEAR?

A children's advocacy group complained that an animated video on the NORAD Tracks Santa website injected militarism into Christmas by showing fighter jets escorting Santa's sleigh on a 39-second video promoting the event. NORAD says the fighter escort is nothing new. NORAD began depicting jets accompanying Santa and his reindeer in the 1960s.

5. WHAT DO KIDS ASK WHEN THEY CALL?

Among the questions kids have had on their minds when they called in previous years:

— "Am I on the nice list or the naughty list?"

— "Can you put my brother on the naughty list?"

— "Are you an elf?"

— "How much to adopt one of Santa's reindeer?"

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