The Global Voice of Pilots

IFALPA

SAFETY BULLETIN

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Operations at Non-Towered Airports due to ATC Zero Conditions

INTRODUCTION

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact flight operations ALPA, International have issued an Operations Bulletin concerning temporary reduced controller staffing or shut down at ATC facilities. The status of the facility during a closure is known as “ATC Zero.” When an Air Traffic Control Tower (ATCT) is ATC Zero, the airport remains open, but the airport reverts to non-towered operations and the airspace usually becomes Class G (uncontrolled) airspace.

ATTACHMENTS

One (1) page bulletin,
Operations at Non-Towered Airports due to ATC Zero Conditions
2021-01, ALPA, International

Air Line Pilots Association, Int'l
Schedule with Safety
OPERATIONS BULLETIN
2021 01

Operations at Non-Towered Airports due to ATC Zero Conditions

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact flight operations. Air Traffic Control (ATC) facilities sometimes reduce controller staffing or shut down temporarily. The status of the facility during a closure is known as "ATC Zero." When an Air Traffic Control Tower (ATCT) is ATC Zero, the airport remains open but the airport reverts to non-towered operations and the airspace usually becomes Class G (uncontrolled) airspace.

It may have been a long time since an airline pilot has operated at a non-towered airport, and some airline pilots may encounter this situation for the first time in their career. All pilots are encouraged to review the regulations and recommended procedures for operating at non-towered airports and in Class G airspace, prior to encountering an ATC Zero ATCT environment.

- Airspace complexity at the ATC Zero airport.
- Airport configuration at the ATC Zero airport.
    - Pay close attention to parallel / intersecting runways
    - Note surface taxi routes that include a runway crossing.
- Review NOTAMs for any special instructions associated with the ATC Zero related ATCT closure.
    - NOTAMS are prefixed with ATC Zero to identify a short notice closure.

Pilots should also consult their airline's flight operations manuals for detailed information relating to No Tower Operations and Class G airspace for any limitations that their airline's Operations Specifications contain. Critical information about specific airport operations is contained in the Jeppesen "Airport Info" and "Airport Info (Contd), Take-Off Minimums" (10-9 and 10-9A) pages under "GENERAL" and "ADDITIONAL RUNWAY INFORMATION." Airline specific airport information should also be consulted.

It should be noted that additional challenges under non-towered airport operations occur when airline operations are conducted at an airport with a significant mix of general aviation operations that include a wide range of aircraft types, sizes, and speeds. The variety of aircraft can range from small, low-performance aircraft operating under Visual Flight Rules (VFR) to high-performance turbine-powered aircraft operating under Instrument Flight Rules (IFR). Pilots in the traffic pattern may be student pilots on their first solo, or they may be professionals flying their personal aircraft on their day off work. Therefore, all pilots must exercise extreme caution and vigilance when operating in these environments and must plan for the unexpected. The use of a thorough briefing and crew resource management is critical. Pilots should also remember that they have both the authority and responsibility to avoid operations that they deem unsafe.

Additional resources for operating at non-towered airports are included below:

- 14 CFR Part 91.126-91.130: Electronic CFR Website
- FAA Safety Alert for Operators 20012 - July 6, 2020 - Continuation of Air Carrier and Other Operations in Terminal Airspace when an Air Traffic Control (ATC) Facility with Responsibility for That Controlled Airspace Closes Unexpectedly. SAFO 20012
- Aeronautical Information Manual (AIM) Sections 4-1-9; 4-1-10; 4-3-3; 6-5-1: AIM Website
- FAA Advisory Circular 90-66B – Non-Towered Airport Flight Operations: AC Website
- Pilot's Handbook of Aeronautical Knowledge FAA-H-8083-25B: Pilots Handbook Website

Please direct questions and concerns to Engineering and Air Safety at eas@alpa.org or call (800) 424-2470.

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