

Federal Aviation Agency



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AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL AND GENERAL OPERATIONS	
EFFECTIVE :	3/12/64

SUBJECT : CANCELING OR CLOSING FLIGHT PLANS

1. **PURPOSE.** This advisory circular outlines the need for canceling or closing flight plans promptly to avoid costly search and rescue operations.
2. **BACKGROUND.** Thousands of dollars in needless expense is borne by the Federal Government each year due to failure of some pilots to close or cancel their flight plans. Section 91.83(a) of the Federal Aviation Regulations requires that when a flight plan has been filed, the pilot in command, upon canceling or completing the flight under the flight plan, shall notify the nearest FAA Flight Service Station or ATC Facility. This section applies to IFR as well as VFR flights. However, practically all instances of noncompliance involve pilots on VFR flight plans.
3. **ACTION TAKEN WHEN A FLIGHT PLAN IS NOT CANCELED OR CLOSED.** When a pilot on a VFR flight plan has not filed an arrival report or canceled his flight plan within one half hour (fifteen minutes if the aircraft is a jet) after his estimated time of arrival, the aircraft is considered overdue. This triggers the following actions:
 - a. An Information Request (INREQ) is sent by the destination station to all stations along the proposed flight route and to the departure station. Each of these stations checks with all airports within its Flight Plan area which can be contacted by local telephone or government circuits. In addition a preliminary alert is furnished to the appropriate Search and Rescue Coordination Center (SARCC).
 - b. If the replies to the INREQ are negative and the aircraft has not been located within one and one-half hours after the estimated time of arrival, an Alert Notice (ALNOT) is issued. The ALNOT initiates an extended communications search for information throughout the area within flight range of the aircraft, not checked during the INREQ, and where it is reasonably possible the aircraft may have landed. All stations are authorized to use commercial communications facilities,

as necessary, during the ALNOT search. This becomes costly when multiplied by the number of stations involved in the search. In addition, the ALNOT is broadcast by each station, requesting search assistance from flights traversing the search area.

- c. If the aircraft still has not been located one hour after the ALNOT is issued, responsibility for further search is transferred to the SARCC. The SARCC then conducts the actual air and surface searches using planes and pilots of military units and the Civil Air Patrol, as well as personnel of law enforcement agencies, etc. Each hour that the search continues entails a costly outlay of men and equipment.
4. SANCTION. The complex procedures described above were developed to provide all possible assistance to pilots who are actually in difficulty. When they must be implemented due to failure of a pilot, through carelessness or inattention, to close or cancel his flight plan as required, the many man-hours and large amount of money expended are wasted. Pilots should be reminded that violation of Section 91.83 of the Federal Aviation Regulations may result in the instigation of enforcement proceedings.
5. RECOMMENDED ACTION. All pilots should remember that they are solely responsible for closing or canceling their flight plans. This requirement applies to stopovers en route as well as at the destination. The procedure is not difficult since the Flight Service Station is as close as the aircraft radio or a telephone. Extra attention to this matter will better enable Search and Rescue procedures to be utilized for the purpose for which they were developed - to help the pilot in distress - and will also effect a considerable monetary saving to the government.

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