



AC NO: AC 91.83-1A

DATE: 3/25/75

ADVISORY CIRCULAR

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION

10A TECHNICAL UNIT

JAN 2 1987

SUBJECT: CANCELING OR CLOSING FLIGHT PLANS

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1. PURPOSE. This advisory circular emphasizes the need for canceling or closing flight plans.
 2. CANCELLATION. AC 91.83-1 is canceled.
 3. BACKGROUND. Thousands of dollars in needless expense are 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 (FSS) or ATC Facility. Control towers do not automatically close VFR or DVFR flight plans since they may not be aware that a particular flight is on a flight plan.
 4. VFR FLIGHT PLANS.
 - a. When a VFR flight plan is filed, it is held by the FSS until one hour after the proposed departure time and then canceled unless:
 - (1) The actual departure time is received.
 - (2) A revised proposed departure time is received.
 - (3) At the time of filing the FSS is informed that the proposed departure time will be met, but actual time cannot be given because of inadequate communications.
 - b. Once a departure time is received the flight plan is activated. An aircraft on an activated VFR or DVFR flight plan is considered overdue when communications cannot be established with it and it fails to arrive one half hour (fifteen minutes if the aircraft is
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Initiated by: AAT-360

a jet) after its estimated time of arrival. This triggers the following action:

- (1) The destination FSS attempts to locate the aircraft by checking with all adjacent airports that can be reached by government circuits or local telephone. If this communications search does not locate the aircraft, the departure station is notified.
- (2) If the aircraft is not located within one hour after its estimated time of arrival (one half hour for a jet aircraft) an information request (INREQ) message is sent to the departure station, to the Rescue Coordination Center (RCC) and to FSSs along the filed route of flight. On receipt of the INREQ message, FSS records are checked and all airports that can be contacted by interphone or local telephone are checked.
- (3) If replies to the INREQ have been negative or if the aircraft has not been located within one and one half hours after its estimated time of arrival, the destination FSS transmits an alert message (ALNOT) to all circuits serving the search area and to the RCC. If necessary the search area is expanded to the maximum range of the aircraft. On receipt of an ALNOT message, stations conduct an extended search. If necessary commercial communications facilities and law enforcement agencies are used. The ALNOT is broadcast by all FSSs within the search area.
- (4) If the extended communications search fails to locate the aircraft or if one hour has elapsed since ALNOT transmissions, whichever occurs first, responsibility for further search is transferred to the RCC. The RCC then conducts the actual air and surface searches using aircraft 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. IFR FLIGHT PLANS.

- a. An IFR flight plan may be canceled at any time the flight is operating in VFR conditions outside positive controlled airspace by the pilot stating "CANCEL MY IFR FLIGHT PLAN" to the facility with which he is communicating. Immediately after canceling an IFR flight plan, a pilot should take necessary action to change to the appropriate: air/ground frequency, VFR radar beacon code,

VFR altitude/flight level. ATC separation and information services will be discontinued, including radar services where applicable. Consequently, if the canceling flight desires VFR radar advisory service, the pilot must specifically request it. In addition, pilots must be aware that other procedures may be applicable to a flight that cancels an IFR flight plan within an area where a special program has been established, e.g., a designated Terminal Radar Service Area or Terminal Control Area.

- b. If a DVFR flight plan requirement exists the pilot is responsible for filing this flight plan to replace the canceled IFR flight plan. If a subsequent IFR operation becomes necessary, a new IFR flight plan must be filed and an ATC clearance obtained before operating in IFR conditions.
 - c. If operating on an IFR flight plan to an airport with a functioning control tower, the flight plan is automatically closed upon landing.
 - d. If operating on an IFR flight plan to an airport where there is no functioning control tower, the pilot must close the flight plan. This can be done after landing if there is a functioning FSS or other means of direct communications with ATC. In the event there is no FSS and air/ground communications with ATC is not possible below a certain altitude, the pilot should, weather conditions permitting, cancel his flight plan while still airborne and able to communicate by radio. This will not only save the time and expense of closing the flight plan by telephone but will quickly release the airspace for use by other aircraft.
 - e. If operating from an airport not served by direct ATC communications, the pilot may receive a clearance containing a provision that if the flight has not departed by a specified time the clearance is void. In this situation the pilot who does not depart prior to the void time must advise ATC whether he wishes another ATC clearance or wishes to cancel his flight plan.
5. SANCTION. The procedures described above were developed to provide all possible assistance to pilots. When overdue procedures must be implemented due to failure of a pilot through carelessness to close or cancel his flight plan, the many man-hours and large amount of money expended are wasted. Pilots are reminded that failure to cancel or close their flight plan is a violation of Section 91.83 of the Federal Aviation Regulations.

6. RECOMMENDED ACTION. All pilots should remember their responsibility to close or cancel their flight plans. When on a VFR flight plan and it becomes necessary, the pilot should extend his time en route. The procedure is not difficult since an FSS 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 and will result in a considerable saving of money.


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