



U.S. Department
of Transportation
**Federal Aviation
Administration**

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Advisory Circular

Subject: CANCELLING OR CLOSING FLIGHT
PLANS

Date: June 24, 1982
Initiated by: AAT-360

AC No: 91.83-1B
Change:

1. PURPOSE. This advisory circular explains FAA procedures for handling flight plans and emphasizes the need for cancelling or closing flight plans.
2. CANCELLATION. AC 91.83-1A is cancelled.
3. BACKGROUND. Thousand 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 (d) of the Federal Aviation Regulations requires that when a flight plan has been activated, the pilot in command upon cancelling or completing the flight under the flight plan shall notify an FAA Flight Service Station (FSS) or Air Traffic Control 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. A VFR flight plan may be filed with any FSS regardless of departure point. It will be held by the FSS until one hour after the proposed departure time and then cancelled unless:
 - (1) A departure report 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 departure time cannot be reported because of inadequate communications capability.
 - b. Once a departure report is recieved, 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 30 minutes

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after its estimated time of arrival. This triggers the following actions:

(1) The destination FSS attempts to locate the aircraft by checking with all adjacent airports and with appropriate towers and Air Route Traffic Control Center (ARTCC) sectors.

(2) If this communications search does not locate the aircraft, the departure station is notified and conducts a local check for any information about the aircraft.

(3) If the above checks produce negative results or if the aircraft is not located within 1 hour after its estimated time of arrival, an information request (INREQ) message is sent to the departure station to the Rescue Coordination Center (RCC), and to FSS's, towers, and ARTCC's along the filed route of flight. Recipients are required to seek information about the aircraft by checking facility records and by checking appropriate airports along the proposed route of flight.

(4) If replies to the INREQ have been negative or if the aircraft has not been located within 2 hours after its estimated time of arrival, the destination FSS transmits an alert notice (ALNOT) message to all FAA facilities in the search area and to the RCC. If deemed necessary, the search area is expanded to the maximum range of the aircraft. An ALNOT triggers an extended search. If necessary, assistance of law enforcement agencies is obtained.

(5) If the extended communications search fails to locate the aircraft or if 1 hour has elapsed since ALNOT transmission, 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.

5. IFR FLIGHT PLANS.

a. An IFR flight plan may be cancelled 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 cancelling an IFR flight plan, a pilot should take necessary action to change to the appropriate air/ground frequency, VFR transponder code, and VFR altitude/flight level. ATC separation and information services will be discontinued, including radar services where applicable. Consequently, if the cancelling 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 cancelled 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.

6. 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.

7. RECOMMENDED ACTION. All pilots should remember their responsibility to close or cancel their flight plans. When on a VFR flight plan and a 30-minute change in estimated time en route occurs, the pilot should contact an FSS and extend his time en route. The procedure is not difficult since an FSS is as close as the aircraft radio or a telephone. Pilots are also encouraged to make routine VFR position reports en route. 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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