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**Federal Aviation Agency**



AC NO: AC 90-25

AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL  
AND  
GENERAL OPERATIONS

3/22/65

**SUBJECT :** CONTACT APPROACH

1. **PURPOSE.** This circular announces Federal Aviation Agency actions concerning the flight procedure commonly known as a "contact-approach." It describes a newly adopted definition and the conditions under which air traffic control may authorize use of that procedure.
2. **BACKGROUND.** Standard instrument approach procedures are established for use during IFR flight conditions when a pilot cannot conduct an approach from the assigned en route or holding pattern altitude and location to the destination airport by visual reference to the surface. These procedures specify courses and minimum altitudes which provide for a safe approach with respect to obstructions and environment. They specify the missed approach action to be taken in the event the approach cannot be completed.

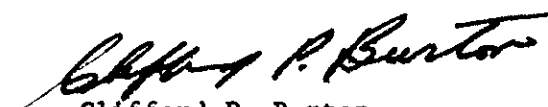
For many years, the procedure known as a contact approach has sometimes been used in lieu of a prescribed instrument approach procedure. The procedure has never been defined nor have any limitations, except the requirement for an air traffic control authorization, ever been imposed upon it. Over the years a number of factors directly related to the safety surrounding such approaches have changed. Obstructions to air navigation, the speed and complexity of aircraft and the amount and complexity of air traffic have all increased. The Agency, in recognition of these and other possible hazards involved, has decided that the contact approach should be defined with appropriate limitations.

We recognize that there is a point during each instrument approach where the pilot transitions from flight solely by reference to navigational instruments to flight by visual reference to the surface. This transition point will vary with individual pilots and combinations of aircraft, airports, approach procedures and weather conditions. We believe that a standard procedure should exist whereby a pilot may, at some point during the conduct of an instrument flight, proceed to the airport by visual reference to the surface.

Since such a procedure will normally be used during weather conditions less than those specified for Basic VFR, i.e., during IFR or Special VFR weather conditions, standard IFR separation between aircraft must be provided and authorization by air traffic control is required. Because the approach will be conducted not by reference to navigational instruments but by visual reference to the surface, the Agency has determined that a requirement to remain clear of clouds with a flight visibility of at least 1 mile is reasonable. This procedure is intended primarily as an alternative for a prescribed IFR approach procedure, and pilots should use discretion in conducting a contact approach. When the pilot receives an ATC clearance for a contact approach, he comes within the exemption from the minimum altitude requirements of FAR 91.79 and 91.119 when approaching to land. The pilot must realize that he assumes the responsibility for obstruction clearance by electing to abandon the safeguards which are guaranteed by compliance with FAR 91.119 and a published instrument approach procedure.

3. ACTION. The following newly defined term is being added to the Manual of Air Traffic Control Procedures, along with appropriate procedural instructions for air traffic controllers.

- a. Definition of Contact Approach. An approach wherein an aircraft on an IFR flight plan, operating clear of clouds with at least 1 mile flight visibility and having received an air traffic control authorization, may deviate from the prescribed instrument approach procedure and proceed to the airport of destination by visual reference to the surface."
- b. Air Traffic Control Procedures. Effective May 1, 1965, air traffic controllers will clear an aircraft for a contact approach only if:
  - (1) The pilot so requests;
  - (2) The reported ground visibility at the destination airport is at least;
    - (a) One-half statute mile for air carrier aircraft (Operations Specifications permit certain Air Carriers to land under such conditions when the reduced visibility is due to a local surface restriction), or
    - (b) One statute mile for all other aircraft; and
  - (3) Approved separation can be applied between aircraft so cleared and between those aircraft and other aircraft.



Clifford P. Burton  
Acting Director  
Air Traffic Service