M-494.4

U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Aviation Administration

Advisory Circular

Subject: TRAFFIC ADVISORY PRACTICES AT UNCONTROLLED AIRPORTS	Date: 11/19/82	AC No: AC 90-42C
	Initiated by: AAT-320	Change:

1. PURPOSE. This circular contains good operating practices and procedures for use when approaching or departing airports that do not have a tower in operation.

2. CANCELLATION. Advisory Circular AC 90-42B, dated January 25, 1980, is canceled.

3. DEFINITIONS.

a. Uncontrolled Airport - A public use airport without a control tower or where the tower is not in operation.

b. Common Traffic Advisory Frequency (CTAF) - A frequency designed for the purpose of carrying out airport advisory practices while operating to or from an uncontrolled airport. The CTAF may be a UNICOM, MULTICOM, FSS, or tower frequency and is identified in appropriate aeronautical publications.

4. DISCUSSION.

a. In the interest of promoting safety, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), through its Airman's Information Manual (AIM), Airport Facility Directory, advisory circular, and other publications, provides frequency information, good operating practices, and/or procedures for pilots to use when operating to or from an uncontrolled airport.

b. There is no substitute for alertness while in the vicinity of an airport. It is essential that pilots be aware of and look for other traffic and exchange traffic information when approaching or departing an uncontrolled airport. This is of particular importance since other aircraft may not have communication capability or pilots may not communicate

their presence or intentions when operating into or out of such airports. To achieve the greatest degree of safety, it is essential that all radio-equipped aircraft transmit/receive on a common frequency identified for the purpose of carrying out airport advisory practices.

c. An airport may have a full- or part-time tower or flight service station (FSS) located on the airport or a full- or part-time UNICOM station or no aeronautical station. There are three ways for a pilot to communicate his/her intentions or obtain airport/traffic information when operating at an airport that does not have an operating tower--by communicating with an FSS, a UNICOM operator, or by making a self-announce broadcast.

d. The key to communicating at an uncontrolled airport is selection of the correct common frequency. The contraction "CTAF," which stands for Common Traffic Advisory Frequency, is synonymous with this program. The CTAF for each uncontrolled airport will be disseminated in appropriate aeronautical information publications. The CTAF frequency for a particular airport can also be obtained by contacting any FSS. Use of the appropriate CTAF, combined with a visual alertness and application of the following recommended good operating practices, will enhance safety of flight into and out of all uncontrolled airports.

5. RECOMMENDED TRAFFIC ADVISORY PRACTICES. All inbound traffic should monitor and communicate as appropriate on the designated CTAF from 10 miles to landing. Departure aircraft should monitor/communicate on the appropriate frequency from start-up, during taxi, and until 10 miles from the airport unless the FAR's or local procedures require otherwise.

6. AIRPORT ADVISORY SERVICE PROVIDED BY AN FSS.

a. Airport Advisory Service (AAS) is a service provided by an FSS physically located on an airport which does not have a control tower or where the tower is temporarily closed or operated on a part-time basis. The CTAF for FSS's which provides this service will be disseminated in appropriate aeronautical publications.

b. In communicating with a CTAF FSS establish two-way communications before transmitting outbound/inbound intentions or information. Departing aircraft should state the aircraft type, full identification number, type of flight planned, i.e., VFR or IFR and the planned destination or direction of flight. Report before taxiing and before taking runway for takeoff. If communications with a UNICOM are necessary after initial report to FSS, return to FSS frequency for traffic update.

c. A CTAF FSS provides wind direction and velocity, favored or designated runway, altimeter setting, known traffic, notices to airmen, airport taxi routes, airport traffic pattern information, and instrument approach procedures. These elements are varied so as to best serve the current traffic situation. Some airport managers have specified that under certain wind or other conditions designated runways are used. Pilots using other than the favored or designated runway should advise the FSS immediately. (Caution: All aircraft in the vicinity of an airport may not be in communication with the FSS.)

7. INFORMATION PROVIDED BY AERONAUTICAL ADVISORY STATIONS (UNICOM).

a. UNICOM is a nongovernment air/ground radio communication station which may provide airport information at public use airports where there is no tower or FSS.

b. On pilot request, UNICOM stations may provide pilots with weather information, wind direction, the recommended runway, or other necessary information. If the UNICOM frequency is designated as the CTAF, it will be identified in appropriate aeronautical publications.

8. UNICOM COMMUNICATION PROCEDURES.

a. In communicating with a UNICOM station, the following practices will help reduce frequency congestion, facilitate a better understanding of pilot intentions and location in the traffic pattern, and enhance safety of flight:

1. Select the correct UNICOM frequency.

2. State the identification of the UNICOM station you are calling in each transmission. Make sure you receive a response from the station being called since UNICOM stations and aircraft at other nearby airports may be using the same UNICOM frequency.

3. Speak slowly and distinctly.

4. Call approximately 10 miles from the airport and state your aircraft identification, type of aircraft, altitude, location relative to the airport, and request wind information and runway in use.

5. Report on downwind, base, and/or final approach as appropriate.

6. Report clearing the runway.

b. Recommended UNICOM Phraseologies:

(1) Inbound

Example:

FREDERICK UNICOM CESSNA 182 TANGO FOXTROT 10 MILES SOUTHEAST DESCENDING THROUGH (ALTITUDE) LANDING FREDERICK, REQUEST WIND AND RUNWAY INFORMATION.

FREDERICK TRAFFIC CESSNA 182 TANGO FOXTROT ENTERING DOWNWIND/BASE/FINAL (AS APPROPRIATE) FOR RUNWAY ONE NINE.

FREDERICK TRAFFIC CESSNA 182 TANGO FOXTROT CLEAR OF RUNWAY ONE NINE.

(2) Outbound

Example:

FREDERICK UNICOM CESSNA 182 TANGO FOXTROT (LOCATION ON AIRPORT) TAXIING TO

RUNWAY ONE NINE OR REQUEST WIND AND RUNWAY INFORMATION.

FREDERICK TRAFFIC CESSNA 182 TANGO FOXTROT DEPARTING RUNWAY ONE NINE.

9. SELF-ANNOUNCE OF POSITION AND/OR INTENTIONS.

a. "Self-announce" is a procedure whereby pilots broadcast their position or intented flight activity or ground operation in the blind on the designated CTAF. This procedure is used primarily at airports which do not have an FSS or UNICOM station on the airport. The self-announce procedure should also be used if a pilot is unable to communicate with the designated CTAF FSS or UNICOM. It should be noted that aircraft operating to or from another nearby airport may be making self-announce broadcasts on the same UNICOM or MULTICOM frequency. To help identify one airport from another, the airport name should be spoken at the beginning and end of each self-announce transmission.

b. If an airport has a tower and it is temporarily closed, or operated on a part-time basis and there is no FSS on the airport or the FSS is closed, use the CTAF (usually the tower local control frequency) to self-announce your position or intentions. If there is a UNICOM station in operation on the airport, the wind direction and runway in use should be obtained from the UNICOM station.* Then return to and monitor the CTAF and make self-announce broadcasts as appropriate. *The wind direction and runway information may not be available on UNICOM frequency 122.950.

c. Where there is no tower, FSS, or UNICOM station on the airport, use MULTICOM frequency 122.9 for self-announce procedures. Such airports will be identified in appropriate aeronautical information publications.

d. Recommended Self-Announce Phraseologies:

(1) Inbound

Example:

STRAWN TRAFFIC, APACHE TWO TWO FIVE ZULU, (POSITION), (ALTITUDE), OR DESCENDING THROUGH (ALTITUDE) OR ENTERING DOWNWIND/BASE/FINAL (AS APPROPRIATE) RUNWAY ONE SEVEN STRAWN, ETC.

STRAWN TRAFFIC APACHE TWO TWO FIVE ZULU CLEAR OF RUNWAY ONE SEVEN STRAWN.

(2) Outbound

Example:

STRAWN TRAFFIC, QUEEENAIRE SEVEN ONE FIVE FIVE BRAVO (LOCATION ON AIRPORT) TAXIING TO RUNWAY TWO SIX STRAWN.

STRAWN TRAFFIC, QUEENAIRE SEVEN ONE FIVE FIVE BRAVO DEPARTING RUNWAY TWO SIX STRAWN.

10. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED COMMUNICATION PROCEDURES.

FACILITY AT AIRPORT	FREQUENCY USE	COMMUNICATION/BROADCAST PROCEDURES	
		OUTBOUND	INBOUND
a. UNICOM (No Tower or FSS)	Communicate with UNICOM station on published CTAF frequency (122.7, 122.8, or 123.0). If unable to contact UNICOM station, use self-announce procedures on CTAF	Before taxiing and taking runway for takeoff.	10 miles out. Entering downwind Base or final. Clear of runway.
b. No Tower, FSS, or UNICOM	Self-announce on CTAF MULTICOM frequency 122.9		
c. No Tower, Tower Closed, FSS Open	Communicate with FSS on CTAF frequency.		
d. FSS Closed * (No Tower)	Self-announce on CTAF.		
e. Tower Closed, * FSS Closed, or no FSS	Self-announce on CTAF.		

*If there is a UNICOM station in operation on the airport, obtain wind and runway information from UNICOM. Return to and monitor CTAF and make self-announce broadcasts as appropriate. The wind direction and runway information may not be available on UNICOM frequency 122.950.

11. IFR AIRCRAFT. When operating in accordance with an IFR clearance and ATC approves a change to the advisory frequency, make an expeditious change to the CTAF and employ the appropriate traffic advisory procedures.

12. GROUND VEHICLE OPERATION. Airport ground vehicles equipped with radios should monitor the CTAF frequency when operating on the movement area of an airport and remain clear of runways/taxiways being used by aircraft. Radio transmissions from ground vehicles should be confined to safety-related matters.

13. RADIO CONTROL OF AIRPORT LIGHTING SYSTEMS. Whenever possible, the CTAF will be used to control airport lighting systems at uncontrolled airports. This eliminates the need for pilots to change frequencies to turn the lights on and allows a continuous listening watch on a single frequency. The CTAF is published on the instrument approach chart and in other appropriate aeronautical information publications. For further details concerning radio controlled lights, see AC 150/5340.27.

14. DESIGNATED UNICOM/MULTICOM FREQUENCIES. The following listing depicts UNICOM and MULTICOM frequency uses as designated by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

Frequency	Use
122.700	Uncontrolled airports
122.800	Uncontrolled airports
123.000	Uncontrolled airports
122.900	(MULTICOM FREQUENCY) Airports with no tower, FSS, Or UNICOM
122.950	Airports with a control tower
122.725	Private airports (not open to public)
122.750	Private airports (not open to public) and air-to-air communications
122.975	High altitude
123.050	Heliports
123.075	Heliports

NOTE: In some areas of the country, frequency interference may be encountered from nearby airports using the same UNICOM frequency. Where this is a problem, UNICOM operators are encouraged to develop a "least interference" frequency assignment plan for airports concerned using the three frequencies designated for uncontrolled airports. UNICOM licensees may then request FCC to assign frequencies in accordance with the plan, which they will be glad to consider.

15. USE OF UNICOM FOR ATC PURPOSES. UNICOM SERVICE SHALL NOT BE USED FOR AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL PURPOSES, except for the verbatim relay of ATC information limited to the following:

a. Revision of proposed departure time.

b. Takeoff, arrival, or flight plan cancellation time.

c. ATC clearance, provided arrangements are made between the ATC facility and the UNICOM licensee to handle such messages.

16. MISCELLANEOUS. The rapid growth of general aviation and the increased traffic at many uncontrolled airports require the highest degree of vigilance on the part of pilots to see and avoid aircraft while operating to or from such airports. Pilots should stay alert at all times, anticipate the unexpected, use the published CTAF frequency, and follow recommended airport advisory practices.

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Director, Air Traffic Service

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