



# OPERATIONS BULLETIN

2013-01

## NON-TOWERED AIRPORT OPERATIONS

The FAA plans to close a number of control towers beginning April 7, 2013 at airports with low numbers of commercial operations and reduce operating hours at others. While ALPA pilots have successfully faced the challenges of operating at non-towered airports for many years, the upcoming changes may mean pilots will be operating using procedures they have not recently experienced.

Each airport may have unique circumstances but the items below serve as a general reminder of the most significant differences between towered and non-towered operations. As always, careful preflight planning, situational awareness, and procedural knowledge will be key to safe operations. ALPA recommends that all pilots review company Flight Operations Manual and applicable Operations Specifications for operations at non-towered airports and keep the following in mind during arrival and departure:

- Expect a frequency transfer to UNICOM/CTAF with enough time to check in and sequence yourself into the traffic pattern. Review AIM 4-1-9 and company procedures for non-towered operations.
- Upon changing to UNICOM/CTAF, ATC will stop providing traffic advisories and sequencing services. Announce your position frequently and increase vigilance for VFR traffic. Ref AIM 4-1-10
- ATC may employ non-radar procedures (e.g., compulsory reporting points, waypoint estimates, etc.). Review AIM 5-3-2 for information on making required position reports.
- Non-towered airports will have reduced operational rates (i.e. “one in and one out”) for IFR flights. Expect the possibility of increased holding and manage fuel accordingly.
- Some, but not all, non-towered airports have Automated Weather Observations System (AWOS). Review the airport chart for alternate weather source information. Ref. AIM 7-1-12
  - Higher landing minima may be in effect if an alternate altimeter source is in use
- NAVAIDS and ILS Critical Areas may be unmonitored.
- When a tower is unavailable to monitor operations for emergencies, part 139 airports are still required to have procedures and equipment for alerting rescue and firefighting personnel during air carrier operations.
- Pilots are responsible for cancelling IFR flight plans on arrival. Per FAR 91.169 the pilot in command, upon canceling or completing the flight under the flight plan, shall notify an FAA Flight Service Station or ATC facility.
- Departure clearances should be requested through ATC or FSS with enough time to avoid departure delays. Expect increased usage of Estimated Departure Clearance Times (EDCT) to control IFR departures from non-towered airports. Departure must be made from 5 minutes prior to 15 minutes after the EDCT time.
- At airports with intersecting runways or flight paths, be particularly vigilant for crossing traffic, especially at night or with reduced visibility. All aircraft should announce their intentions.
- Be aware that pilot-controlled lighting may be the only way to operate approach, runway and taxiway lights at some facilities.

Please provide any feedback to your MEC Central Air Safety Committee and to [EAS@alpa.org](mailto:EAS@alpa.org). FAA is evaluating non-towered airport procedures to ensure suitability for this expanded use, and ALPA will remain in contact with FAA and airlines to ensure operational issues are identified and addressed.

Captain Chuck Hogeman  
Air Safety Chairman

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