

# HSAC Guidelines for Flight Following Manual

## Aerial Observation (RP) 2008-01 Revision 1

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### Purpose:

This Recommended Practice provides a guideline for real-time satellite flight following and to provide sufficient tracking capability in the event an operator does not utilize satellite tracking or the satellite system is not functioning.

### Background:

The purpose of a flight following system is to keep the operator aware of the position and status of each aircraft and its crew. This is to include an overdue aircraft alert and trigger of the Emergency Response Plan (ERP) should an aircraft become overdue or report an in-flight emergency (SOS). In the event of an emergency, an effective flight following program provides an accurate last known position, persons on-board, and projected flight path information which can be provided to search and rescue services.

It is preferred that each patrol operator employ a monitored real-time satellite tracking system on each aircraft deployed for aerial patrol, however there may be several reasons for utilizing a manual system such as the satellite system being inoperative or removed for service. In these cases, a positive flight following procedure should be documented and followed with a maximum length of time established for communication between the aircraft and company flight following personnel.

It is recommended the Flight Following systems be separate from ADS-B equipment to ensure tracking in areas where ADS-B coverage may be intermittent or not available.

### Recommended Automated Satellite Flight Following Technical Features:

1. Automated activation without pilot input;
2. Automatic and pilot activated SOS notifications;
3. Web or app based interface displaying aircraft current position on a map;
4. Two minute or better position reporting interval;
5. Notification of personnel of SOS (for example, by text message), with the functionality to escalate SOS notifications that are not acknowledged or closed;
6. Various ADS-B flight tracking software can be utilized as an effective supplemental backup to automated satellite flight following.

## **Responsibilities and Recommended Procedures:**

### **Responsibilities of the Operator –**

The Operator is responsible for maintaining an accurate and timely awareness of the location and status of each aircraft and crew. This status must be maintained by a person or facility not engaged in flight activities and will usually be a ground based dispatcher or Flight Following Administrator (FFA). The status of each flight shall be maintained on a written or computerized Daily Flight Following Log which will be updated in real-time as new information is received. The Flight Following process should be fully integrated with the company's ERP.

### **Responsibilities of the Pilot –**

The pilot is responsible for reporting all required information to the Operator/FFA in a timely manner. This will usually be accomplished by way of cell phone, email, text message, etc. These reports generally should be made prior to each take-off, upon each landing, or when an event necessitate a change to the flight path, destination, estimated time of arrival (ETA) or aircraft status.

### **Recommend Procedures for Pilot –**

1. Provide the FFA with appropriate flight information (see Flight Following Log below);
2. Indicate whether automated flight following via satellite or manual flight following will be utilized;
3. Close their flight with the FFA;
4. Notify the FFA of any changes to the planned flight that are different from previously communicated;
5. When manual flight following is used (satellite system is down or not installed), provide position reports not to exceed 30 minutes between reports.

### **Responsibilities of the Flight Following Administrator –**

The FFA will log all notifications from the pilots as they are received and maintain the log in a timely and accurate way such that the location and status of each flight is available to the operator. The FFA will also have a method of being alerted in the event that the estimated time of arrival (ETA) of an aircraft is exceeded.

The FFA is also responsible to initiate a company's "overdue aircraft" procedure as outlined in a company's ERP.

### **Recommended Procedures for Flight Following Administrator –**

1. Establish access to the satellite flight following interface (website or app) and flight following log;
2. Validate satellite automated flight following system against flight following log to ensure that all aircraft are displaying and tracking accurately;
3. Keep the satellite automated flight following system interface running and accessible during the entire flight;
4. Check and update flight progress as appropriate during the flight. Maintain and document the flight following log;
5. In the event that the satellite automated flight following system shuts down (satellite connectivity failure), notify all airborne and departing pilots of the need to utilize manual flight following;
6. Manual flight following should be utilized with 30 minute interval reporting of aircraft position whenever automatic satellite following is not in place;
7. If flight following will be handed off to another FFA during flight operations, a briefing will occur between administrators as to the status of ongoing and expected flights;
8. SOS notifications will each be immediately investigated to determine cause, with ERP activated in the event of suspected emergency (evaluate potential false positive SOS notifications);
9. Overdue aircraft will be investigated to determine cause as per ERP.

### **Recommended Elements of a Flight Following Log –**

Prior to each departure the pilot should provide the FFA with the following minimum information, which is to be documented as the required elements of a Flight Following Log:

1. Aircraft Identification;
2. Point of Departure;
3. Departure Time;
4. Hours of Fuel on Board;
5. Route of Flight (Patrol Route);
6. Intended Destination;
7. Estimated Time of Arrival/Time Enroute;
8. Name(s) of crewmembers and emergency contact information of any passengers (non-crew).

As soon as practical upon landing, the pilot will report their point of landing to close their flight with the FFA. Closed flights should be documented in the Flight Following Log as completed.

## **Reporting Deviations in the Flight Plan to the Flight Following Administrator –**

In addition to routine reports, the pilot will communicate any of the following to the FFA in a timely manner:

1. Change in ETA by more than 10 minutes;
2. Change in Route of Flight;
3. Change in Aircraft Status.

## **Overdue Aircraft –**

An aircraft will be considered overdue if the pilot has not reported landing or deviation to their flight plan within 10 minutes after their ETA. It is recommended that the FFA proactively attempt to contact the crew within the ETA plus 10 minute period. In the event that the aircraft is overdue and contact cannot be established:

1. Monitor the aircraft on the satellite flight following interface;
2. Continue to attempt to contact the flight crew by radio, cell phone, text, or other appropriate means;
3. Contact the FBO at the intended destination to determine if they have contact with the aircraft/crew;
4. Implement ERP in accordance with operator established procedures.

**Continuous Monitoring during Active Flight Operations** - A FFA must maintain continuous monitoring of aircraft throughout the duration of flight operations, including weekend and night time coverage. If the FFA must leave their duty station (end of shift or break) a procedure should be in place to transfer their duties to another trained FFA without gaps in the flight following coverage. If multiple FFA's are used to cover different geographic regions, there should be a formalized exchange when an aircraft transitions from one region to the next.

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