



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

SAFO

Safety Alert for Operators

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Flight Standards Service
Washington, DC

http://www.faa.gov/other_visit/aviation_industry/airline_operators/airline_safety/safo

A SAFO contains important safety information and may include recommended action. Besides the specific action recommended in a SAFO, an alternative action may be as effective in addressing the safety issue named in the SAFO. The contents of this document do not have the force and effect of law and are not meant to bind the public in any way. This document is intended only to provide clarity to the public regarding existing requirements under the law or agency policies.

Subject: Operations in Oceanic Airspace during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency.

Purpose: This SAFO serves to advise flightcrews of the potential loss of Air Traffic Control (ATC) services in the event of an oceanic ATC facility shutdown and recommends the mitigating procedures contained herein.

Background: Suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19 among ATC facility staff and technicians that provide service to such facilities have led and will likely continue to lead to intermittent, total, or partial closures of ATC facilities, which may occur with little or no warning. Accordingly, the Flight Standards Service is providing recommended actions for flightcrews and operators, in anticipation of potential disruptions in ATC services due to an oceanic ATC facility shutdown.

Recommended Action: Flightcrews are encouraged to review relevant guidance in the Aeronautical Information Publications (AIP) for the countries where they operate; regional operational air traffic management contingency plans, such as the Air Traffic Management Operational Contingency Plan for the North Atlantic Region (NAT) Doc 006; and Regional Supplements Doc 7030. Operators should ensure that flightcrews and dispatchers, if applicable, are familiar with the guidance contained in their contingency plans for unexpected closure of an oceanic ATC facility. See references and considerations in the Appendix to this SAFO.

Contact: Questions or comments regarding this SAFO should be directed to the Flight Technologies and Procedures Division at 202-267-8790 or the Air Transportation Division at 202-267-8166.

Appendix
Contingency Considerations for Unexpected Closure of an Oceanic ATC Facility

Flights within any oceanic airspace

Continue as last cleared and contact the next ATC unit as soon as possible with a position report. Flights operating with an oceanic clearance are expected to continue in accordance with the last clearance issued, unless otherwise advised by ATC. Flightcrews should use extreme caution and use all available means to detect any conflicting traffic.

Flights approaching any oceanic airspace when the contingency is activated

Not in receipt of an oceanic clearance (where applicable)

Flights not in receipt of an oceanic clearance should land at an appropriate aerodrome or, if feasible, request clearance to avoid the affected Oceanic Control Area (OCA).

In receipt of an acknowledged oceanic clearance (where applicable)

Aircraft operating with a received and acknowledged oceanic clearance can, at the flightcrew's discretion, continue, but should expect limited ATC service within the affected OCA. Due to the uncertainty surrounding the contingency situation, flightcrews should, if possible, consider seeking a clearance to reroute around the affected OCA.

Flightcrews are requested to broadcast traffic information in the blind to other flights/stations on 121.5 and on 123.45 (or 126.9 MHz as appropriate in designated International Air Transport Association (IATA) broadcast areas), in order to exchange position information. A continuous watch and regular broadcasts, per 14 CFR § 91.183, must be maintained.

Operators and flightcrews should be advised that ATC may invoke the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Traffic Information Broadcast by Aircraft (TIBA) procedure, with flightcrew member broadcasts in the following form:

- ALL STATIONS (call sign), FLIGHT LEVEL (number) (or CLIMBING/DESCENDING TO FLIGHT LEVEL (number)) (direction) (ATS route) (or DIRECT FROM (position) TO (position)) POSITION (position) AT (time) ESTIMATING (next reporting point, or the point of crossing or joining a designated ATS route) AT (time) (call sign) FLIGHT LEVEL (number) (direction) TIBA calls should be provided by a flightcrew member at the following times:
 - a) 10 minutes before entering the designated airspace or, for a flightcrew member taking off from an aerodrome located within the lateral limits of the designated airspace, as soon as appropriate after take-off;
 - b) 10 minutes prior to crossing a reporting point;
 - c) 10 minutes prior to crossing or joining an ATS route;
 - d) at 20-minute intervals between distant reporting points;
 - e) 2 to 5 minutes, where possible, before a change in flight level;
 - f) at the time of a change in flight level; and
 - g) at any other time considered necessary by flightcrew.

Additional considerations:

- Flights involved in level change should complete the maneuver as soon as possible in accordance with the clearance.
- Mandatory position reports should be accomplished via high frequency (HF) or satellite voice (SATVOICE) until directed by ATC.
- Flights equipped with Future Air Navigation System (FANS) 1/A or equivalent should communicate using HF voice or SATVOICE while attempting to reestablish Controller Pilot Data Link Communications (CPDLC) connection in airspace where ATC services are suspended.
- Flights may request their flight dispatch offices to provide traffic information and/or forward position reports, to the relevant OCA.

Standard oceanic checks:

Due to the unpredictable nature of a loss of ATC services as a result of COVID-19 impacts on ATS facilities, all operators and flightcrews should plan their operations anticipating a loss of ATC services at any point in the flight. Operators and flightcrews should exercise extra vigilance with course verification procedures (e.g., plotting) to track their progress and assist in identifying deviations from their cleared track. The following procedures are especially important:

1. Verify and adhere to the current effective clearance received from ATS facilities [Mach (if assigned) or airspeed may need to be adjusted based on proximate traffic].
2. Utilize applicable course verification procedures (e.g., plotting).
3. Conduct navigation accuracy checks.
4. Conduct waypoint and 10-minute post-position checks.
5. Utilize strategic lateral offset procedures (SLOP): fly up to 2NM right of course.
6. Prior to departure, ensure that the Traffic Alert and Collision Avoidance System (TCAS), if installed, is operative.
7. Applicable contingency plans should be available in the aircraft.

Additional recommendations:

Consistent with AIP recommendations, should flightcrews encounter situations that are not covered by regulation, they are expected to exercise good judgment in whatever action they elect to take.

Additionally, flightcrews should take the following actions:

1. Monitor for traffic visually and by using TCAS or Automatic Dependent Surveillance–Broadcast (ADS-B) In.
2. Ensure all appropriate exterior lights are operable and turned on.
3. Monitor and use, as appropriate, relevant communication channels (e.g., 121.5/123.45 or 126.9 MHz in oceanic airspace) to include HF frequencies for traffic and situational awareness, and SATVOICE and/or data link.

References:

1. IATA's In-flight Broadcast Procedures, see [AC 91-70B](#), App. E.
2. Traffic Information Broadcast by Aircraft, see [ICAO Annex 11](#), Attch. B.
3. Two-way radio communications failure, 14 CFR [§ 91.185](#), and AIP, [GEN 3-4](#), paragraphs 12-13.
4. North Atlantic communications failure, see AIP, [ENR 7.8](#), paragraph 4. See also [NAT Doc 006](#).
5. Pacific communications failure, see [ICAO Annex 2](#), para 3.6.5.2.2. and [Doc 7030](#), PAC para 9.3.
6. Special Procedures for In-Flight Contingencies in Oceanic Airspace, see AIP, [ENR 7.3](#).