

Applicability: All AOC Holders

RADIO TELEPHONE (RTF) USAGE

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) Safety Regulation Group (SRG), in its approach to maintaining high safety standards and safety improvements in civil aviation within the UK, produces an annual Safety Plan. The Plan highlights the safety improvements upon which SRG intends to focus in the forthcoming years. The 2006 Safety Plan will be published on the CAA's web site in early 2006.
- 1.2 In the 2005 Safety Plan the need for clear and unambiguous communication between Air Traffic Control (ATC) and the flight deck was acknowledged as an important factor in assisting the safe and expeditious operation of aircraft. This FODCOM forms part of the actions within the 2005 Safety Plan and provides advice on Radio Telephone (RTF) usage and where to obtain further guidance.

2 RTF Standards

- 2.1 The standards to be used by pilots when using RTF are set out in ICAO Annex 10 Volume 2 (Communications Procedures) to the Convention on International Civil Aviation. The CAA has published CAP 413, Radiotelephony Manual which incorporates much of the ICAO standard and provides pilots with a compendium of clear, concise, standardised phraseology, and associated guidance, for RTF communication in UK airspace. Where the ICAO standard phraseology may be misunderstood, or has weaknesses in the UK environment, different phraseology has been specified and these differences are described in Appendix 1 to the CAP.
- 2.2 CAP 413 is available at the following web site address:

<http://www.caa.co.uk/application.aspx?categoryid=33&pagetype=65&applicationid=11&mode=detail&id=247>

- 2.3 The Air Traffic Standards Department of the CAA is currently conducting a review of CAP 413 with a view to making it more relevant to commercial air transport operations. The revised version of the CAP will be published once this review is complete.

3 Guidance Material

- 3.1 In addition to CAP 413 the CAA has published a Safety Leaflet on RTF discipline. This leaflet, produced with the help of NATS, provides further advice on RTF usage.
- 3.2 The safety leaflet is available at the following web site address:

<http://www.caa.co.uk/docs/50/srgfodsafety-leaflet-rtf.pdf>

4 Survey of RTF Usage

- 4.1 As part of the work associated with the Safety Plan the CAA carried out a survey of RTF usage at two major UK airports and an Air Traffic Control Centre. In addition to general errors in RTF terminology the survey noted two areas where errors were routinely being made which could have a significant impact on safety:
 - Errors in reading back clearances.

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- Omitting required information in the initial call. This category included failing to provide the required information when airborne on a Standard Instrument Departure (SID) e.g. passing level and cleared level, this being particularly pertinent when the aircraft was following a SID involving a stepped climb.

4.2 Guidance on correct RTF usage in the two examples above, and in other situations, are attached to this FODCOM.

5 Instructors and Examiners

5.1 Instructors and examiners have a vital part to play in helping to ensure that a high standard of RTF discipline is maintained. They should always use the correct phraseology themselves and insist on the correct use of RTF phraseology during simulator details. In addition, Line Training Captains should monitor the RTF standards of crews and, where necessary, debrief the crew and provide advice on where to find the appropriate guidance material.

5.2 Training Inspectors of the CAA have been tasked with monitoring the RTF standards of crews, instructors and examiners during routine training inspections.

6 Summary

6.1 RTF standards play an important part in increasing flight safety. Misunderstandings are reduced and frequency congestion minimised by using the correct phraseology. Advice is available in CAP 413 and the CAA's safety leaflet on RTF discipline.

7 Recommendation

7.1 **Operators should encourage flight crew to use the correct RTF phraseology published in CAP 413.**

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Head Aircraft Inspectorate Department
12 January 2006

Recipients of new FODCOMs are asked to ensure that these are copied to their 'in house' or contracted maintenance organisation, to relevant outside contractors, and to all members of their staff who could have an interest in the information or who need to take appropriate action in response to this Communication.

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1 RADIO TELEPHONE (RTF) USAGE

1.1 Errors in reading back clearances

It is clearly important that pilots and air traffic controllers have a mutual understanding of what an aircraft is expected to do following a clearance. To confirm understanding, pilots are required to read back the clearance that they have been given. If air traffic controllers have to routinely correct errors made in a readback the level of RTF congestion increases. In the worst case an air traffic controller may miss a readback error leading to a pilot following an incorrect clearance, with the consequent risk of a level bust or a collision.

Crews should therefore:

- Listen carefully to the clearance being given. This should be done by all flight crew on the flight deck and not just the person using the radio.
- Write the clearance down as it is received.
- Read back the clearance exactly as it was given.
- If uncertain about any detail of the clearance, seek confirmation from ATC.

1.2 Omitting required information in the initial call

When flying instrument departures (including those outside controlled airspace) the following information should be included on initial contact with the first en-route Air Traffic Service Unit (ATSU):

- Callsign;
- SID or Standard Departure Route Designator (where appropriate);
- Current or passing level;
- Initial climb level (i.e. the first level at which the aircraft will level off unless otherwise cleared. For example, on a SID that involves a stepped climb profile, the initial climb level will be the first level specified in the profile).

The inclusion of the current or passing level enables the air traffic controller to verify the accuracy of the Mode C readout. In addition the inclusion of the initial climb level enables the air traffic controller to confirm the pilot's understanding of the level the aircraft has been cleared to.

1.3 Subsequent Frequency Changes

When changing frequency, unless otherwise instructed, the initial call should include aircraft identification and level information only.

Level information must be included in the report as follows:

- If the aircraft is in level flight but cleared to another level, the call should include the current level and the cleared level;
- If the aircraft is climbing or descending, the call should include the cleared level only;

- If the aircraft has been assigned a speed or a heading, this information should also be included in the initial call on the new frequency.

1.4 Emergency Calls

1.4.1 Evidence from incidents suggests that some pilots are reluctant to declare an emergency when they require assistance from ATC. In some instances the emergency call has been made almost as an aside and embedded within a larger message. It is important that pilots are unequivocal when declaring an emergency, and do so earlier rather than later. An emergency call can always be downgraded should circumstances change.

1.4.2 The following points should be considered when dealing with an emergency:

- Request assistance from ATC as soon as there is any doubt about the safe conduct of the flight.
- Pass clear details of difficulties and requirements, using the correct prefix.
- If the emergency places the aircraft in a serious situation or imminent danger and immediate assistance is required the call should be prefixed by 'MAYDAY, MAYDAY, MAYDAY'
- If the emergency affects the safety of the aircraft or person/s on board but does not require immediate assistance the call should be prefixed by 'PAN PAN, PAN PAN, PAN PAN'.
- Do not declare an emergency as part of another message, i.e. limit the call to the appropriate prefix and the associated information.
- If, subsequently, the problem is not as serious as first thought and priority attention is no longer required cancel the emergency.
- If already in communication with ATC, assistance should be requested from the controller on the frequency in use.