



# Memorandum

U.S. Department of  
Transportation


Office of the Secretary  
of Transportation

Office of Inspector General

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Subject: ACTION: Notifications of Temporary Flight  
Restrictions

Date: October 16, 2003

From:   
David A. Dobbs  
Assistant Inspector General  
for Aviation Audits

Reply to  
Attn of: JA-10:x60500

To: Steven J. Brown  
Associate Administrator  
for Air Traffic Services

This memorandum provides the results of our review of the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) progress in providing general aviation pilots with better tools to obtain information on areas where FAA has imposed Temporary Flight Restrictions. The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) requested our assistance in determining FAA's progress in providing the general aviation community with graphical depictions of current Temporary Flight Restrictions on its Internet-based notices to airmen (NOTAM) system and the Direct User Access Terminal (DUAT) system.

Temporary Flight Restrictions have been in a constant state of change since September 11, 2001. Flying into restricted areas is a safety and security issue that can lead to interception by military aircraft and possible legal enforcement action against pilots. In the past, pilots have had to contact an FAA Flight Service Station to obtain the latest Temporary Flight Restriction information. Based on the information obtained from FAA, pilots then would have to either perform complex calculations of latitudes and longitudes to determine the location of the restricted areas, or fly around restricted areas using aircraft navigational aids.

In the 2003 Omnibus Spending Bill, Congress required FAA to provide pilots with Internet-based NOTAMs and graphical advisories for Temporary Flight Restrictions. Placing current graphical information on the Internet for restricted areas would provide pilots with an easy-to-understand map depicting restricted airspace. Additionally, the maps would preclude the need for pilots to plot latitudes and longitudes or attempt to fly around areas using navigational aids. Congress also

suggested that advisory graphics can be conveyed through the DUAT system. Pilots frequently refer to DUAT for weather information when planning flights.

In the past few months, we have closely monitored FAA's work in implementing the congressional mandate to develop an Internet-based NOTAM system. We have discussed steps FAA has taken with the Air Traffic Planning and Procedures Program office, as well as AOPA representatives. While FAA has made important progress, it continues to be stalled in its efforts to get an Internet-based Temporary Flight Restrictions and NOTAM system up and running.

On June 15, 2003, FAA began a 90-day test period for posting graphical depictions of Temporary Flight Restrictions and NOTAMs on its web site. However, according to the FAA's Air Traffic Planning and Procedures office, FAA recognized that the test would not be successful within days of its initiation. FAA officials stated that neither the staff allocated, nor the computer system used in the test period was sufficient to keep data on the web site current, considering the volume of notices being issued. For example, AOPA representatives reported that flight restrictions posted for the July 4<sup>th</sup> holiday remained on the web site until July 9<sup>th</sup>. Some pilots reported that data posted on the web site was frequently a week behind. In other instances, the graphical maps were partially cut off. As a result of these weaknesses, pilots using the web site had incomplete, unusable information or had to comply with unnecessary flight restrictions.

FAA representatives from the Air Traffic Planning and Procedures Program office advised us that they have developed a new approach to reconfigure existing FAA systems so that graphical Temporary Flight Restrictions will be automatically generated as new NOTAMs are issued. The system will have map overlay capability that will include instrument and visual flight rules chart information. Once the system is fully operational, FAA has instructed vendors for the DUAT system to provide pilots with a link through FAA's Temporary Flight Restrictions system allowing them access to the same information provided by the FAA web site. According to the FAA Flight Service Station Operations/Procedures Manager, FAA planned to have the new graphical display system online between September 20, and September 30, 2003.

Based on our review of FAA's NOTAM database, the graphical display system was not implemented on September 30, 2003. While some NOTAM updates are being posted, graphical displays were provided for only 16 percent (or 14) of the 90 Temporary Flight Restrictions listed on the site as of October 7, 2003. We consider implementation of a program to help pilots avoid restricted flight areas an important safety and security issue. While FAA has developed a procedure to provide pilots with Internet-based NOTAMs and Temporary Flight Restrictions, the program has been hindered by continued delays in implementation. AOPA representatives agree that if the currently planned system is implemented, it will address their concerns with FAA's progress in implementing this important safety and security program. We plan

to continue monitoring FAA's progress in developing this program and may initiate an audit in this area in the near future. Therefore, we request that you advise us when this system has been fully implemented.

We appreciate your cooperation and attention to this issue. If you have any questions, please contact me at (202) 366-0500, or Ms. Lou Dixon, Director of Aviation Safety, at (404) 562-3770.

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