



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

SAFO

Safety Alert for Operators

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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: Continuation of Air Carrier and Other Operations in Terminal Airspace when an Air Traffic Control (ATC) Facility with Responsibility for That Controlled Airspace Closes Unexpectedly.

Purpose: This SAFO serves to alert air carriers and commercial operators of the increased risk while operating in terminal airspace or controlled airspace surrounding an airport tower when those ATC facilities unexpectedly cease operations. This SAFO also provides guidance for air carriers and commercial operators authorized to conduct operations under these circumstances.

Background: Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the National Airspace System (NAS) experienced several unplanned ATC facility shutdowns, leaving the designated airspace uncontrolled or controlled by an enroute facility. The possibility of unplanned facility shutdowns continues to exist, whether related to COVID-19 or otherwise.

Discussion: OpSpecs paragraphs C064 and C080 authorize operators to continue operations in terminal airspace without an operating Air Traffic Control Tower (ATCT) or when the airspace is uncontrolled. While some operators commonly conduct operations at smaller airports where traffic is generally not a concern, unexpected closures of ATC facilities at larger, more complex airports certificated under part 139 may present additional risk due to more numerous runways, complex taxiways, additional traffic, and significant changes from normal operational conditions. Thus, the FAA has identified safety recommendations for operators, flightcrews, and dispatchers/flight followers to consider when authorized to conduct such operations.

Recommended Action: Directors of Safety (Part 121 only), Directors of Operations, training managers, flightcrew members, and aircraft dispatchers/flight followers should review OpSpec C064 or C080, as applicable. Additionally, operators authorized to conduct terminal area instrument flight rule (IFR) operations at airports without an operating control tower or in class G (uncontrolled) airspace, should consider the following additional safety measures:

(1) For an airport served by an authorized instrument approach procedure (IAP):

- A. If Instrument Landing System (ILS) approaches are not monitored by an operating ATC facility, operators should not use those approaches for determining alternate minima.

- B. Prior to departure, ensure that the Traffic Alert and Collision Avoidance System (TCAS) if installed, is operative. When aircraft are operating at lighter weight, climb and descent performance in terminal areas at increased rates is common, thereby amplifying the safety benefit of Traffic Alert / Resolution Advisory (TA/RA) information.
- C. The flightcrew and dispatcher or flight follower, as applicable, should review the published instrument missed approach procedures to verify the availability of sufficient navigation facilities that will support a go-around or missed approach.
- D. Special Authorization (SA) Category (CAT) I, SA CAT II, CAT II/III procedures, closely spaced operations and ILS/PRM (Precision Runway Monitoring) when the ATCT at an airport is closed are not authorized on approach charts due to the lack of air traffic control.

(2) For an airport with an approved source of weather, an operator should identify the means the flightcrew will use to obtain weather information if the tower is closed. A backup altimeter source is an approved source of weather and may be used only when designated in the notes of the applicable approach chart. This may result in approach minimums being raised.

(3) When an operator determines that an airport has a suitable means for the pilot-in-command to acquire air traffic advisories and the status of airport services and facilities, the following additional information should also be considered:

- A. The availability for landing and departing aircraft to obtain this information via Automatic Terminal Information Service (ATIS).
- B. The availability of standard taxi routes for arriving and departing aircraft.
- C. Whether the airport publishes a frequency for Common Traffic Advisory Frequency or if frequency information is provided for tower and ground control operations.
- D. The means by which runway lighting is controlled.
- E. Whether the airport has published any information for non-standard traffic patterns.
- F. The means by which a departing aircraft may obtain an ATC clearance on the ground. If the departing aircraft cannot obtain ATC clearance on the ground, reference OpSpec C077.
- G. Pilots of arriving aircraft operating IFR should cancel their IFR flight plan as soon as it is safe to do so after landing. Pilots should manage their IFR clearance in accordance with OpSpec C077.

(4) If an operator determines that an airport has the facilities and services necessary to conduct IFR operations safely and they are available and operational at the time of the particular operation, for part 121 operations, the operator should also determine the availability, status and coordination of emergency response for the airport Aircraft Rescue and Fire Fighting and if it is suitable for the aircraft.

At Special Pilot-in-Command Airports where an ATCT that has been normally available is closed for any reason, the FAA recommends that air carrier operations should be limited to day operations.

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