

ATPAC UPDATE

AREA OF CONCERN 123-7

4/19/06

SAFETY: Yes

SUBJECT: Four Digit Express Carrier Call signs

DISCUSSION: Moderate to busy terminal facilities and en route sectors are experiencing an increasing problem with very similar sounding, 4-digit call signs with express carrier companies. Some carriers have been able to drop the first digit of the call sign when every flight number begins with the same first digit, but those carriers that use different banks of flight numbers cannot. The problem with these high concentrations of 4-digit call signs is frequent miscommunications due to the fact that all of the call signs look and sound somewhat alike. Example: SKY6845, SKW8845, SKW6885, SKW6485. Example: LOF8036, LOF8026, LOF8040, LFO8044. Example: TCF7744, TCF7444, TCF7774, TCF7770. Too often pilots reply to clearances intended for other aircraft due to the similar sounding call signs.

SUGGESTED ATPAC ACTION: There needs to be some encouragement by the FAA or the RAA/ATA to take into consideration the difficulties with communications with the concentration of similar sounding call signs nationwide. For the express carriers that have all of their flight numbers in the same "1,000 bank" of numbers, they should be required to drop the first digit for ATC purposes. This could be done in coordination with flight dispatchers. For those express carriers that have flight numbers in different banks or series of numbers, an option would be to replace the first 2 digits with a single letter at the end of the call sign. Example: SKW6845 would be SKW45G, SKW6485 would be SKW85H, SKW8885 would be SKW85G, etc. Assign a single letter to the first 2 number combinations in a flight number so that it is consistent nationwide. SKW6845 would be SKW45G just as COM6845 would be COM45G. Inconsistency between different carriers would be very difficult to manage.

123 - Can a working group in the PARC address this? The DCP (Pilot Controller Phraseology) subgroup may have human factors information or other input. (Contact is RNAV shop). CDM may also be another possibility for working the issue with AFS involvement.

124 - ATO-S will be queried to determine if sufficient human factors studies exist to warrant a recommendation through appropriate channels to request 3-digit call signs be utilized vice 4-digit. NASA also expressed concurrence with the AOC and the need for action. The committee will consider asking the CDM group to address this item.

125 - Due to insufficient time for the appropriate discussions this AOC will be further deferred until 126.

126 - This item was discussed and decided that further information gathering was appropriate.

127 - A memo will be written outlining this AOC and presented to ATO-T

128 - The ATPAC recommendation memo was approved by consensus and will be submitted to ATO-T with Wilson's signature.

129 - A written recommendation was presented to Rich Jehlen for consideration of ATPAC's recommendations.

130 - A formal request will be made to ATO-T for action.

131 - The memorandum below was presented to ATO-T for their action that represented ATPAC's position.

The Air Traffic Procedures Advisory Committee (ATPAC) has identified a potential problem in the use of four-digit calls signs used primarily by Air Taxi operators at busy hub airports. These operators are generally in support of legacy carriers and therefore, in order to maintain schedule delivery integrity, operate in close time proximity and with air carrier peak times. This actual and increasing potential for error, in the committee's consensus, should be corrected to protect both aircraft and controllers.

ATPAC requests you initiate action to ensure this potential problem area is addressed. The committee recommends that this may be accomplished through coordination with the appropriate airlines and supported by an MBI in the form of Computer Based Instruction or an Air Traffic Bulletin to emphasize to ATC personnel.

RECOMMENDATION #1: FAA investigates solutions through appropriate channels.

RECOMMENDATION #2: Action should be initiated to investigate and remedy.

132 – ATO-T does not agree that this item is an issue. The Chairperson will write to ATA and RAA explaining the problem and invite their comment and participation in Mtg #133. Mr. Hartmann will check his database on call-sign confusion and email results to Ms. Rose

CURRENT STATUS: DEFERRED

IOU REMAINS OPEN (ATPAC Chairperson)

IOU REMAINS OPEN (NASA)