



Vanquishing the VPD

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A quarterly publication from the
Safety Section

Federal Aviation Administration Airports Division
Western-Pacific Region



This publication is primarily directed towards airport management to be disseminated to all levels of personnel working at your airfield. It does not matter how large or how small your airfield or how tight your budget may be or whether your airfield serves general aviation or air carrier operations, this information must be made available to your people by whatever means. Vanquishing the VPD can be accomplished through a solid partnership between the FAA and airport management. The responsibility of making sure safeguards are in place; however, lies squarely on the shoulders of the airport management. Please use this information and all that follows as a guide by which to produce a safer environment at your airfield.

An aircraft being towed or taxied for gate repositioning or maintenance purposes either by pilots or mechanics is treated as a vehicle in the vehicle/pedestrian deviation (VPD) investigatory process. This is because the aircraft is not configured for, nor is it intended for flight. Should someone moving an aircraft under these circumstances interfere with the operations of other aircraft by entering or moving on the movement area without authorization from air traffic control, they have committed a VPD. A distinction is made, however, when the aircraft is being maneuvered under its own power. In accordance with a Letter of Agreement (FAA Order 5210.10, Appendix C), the Flight Standards District Office of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is responsible for investigating VPDs caused by certificated mechanics maneuvering an aircraft in the movement area under engine power. This includes certified mechanics or pilots taxiing aircraft under power for maintenance or gate re-positioning. If, however, the aircraft is being TOWED and the tug driver commits a VPD, the Airports Office of the FAA has jurisdiction and will conduct the investigation.

On July 12, 2002 the FAA was granted a nation wide waiver by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) allowing aircraft being taxied or towed by maintenance personnel on an airport to use a station identification consisting of the company name, the word “maintenance” and the last 3 letters of the “N” number of the aircraft: e.g., “San Francisco ground, ‘United Maintenance’ 789 at the United maintenance base, taxi to gate 75.” The word “maintenance” in the station identification alerts the air traffic ground controller that the person taxiing or towing the aircraft is a mechanic and not a pilot. This was done “in order to reduce the frequency of runway incursions caused by maintenance technicians and otherwise promote public safety at airports”.

A maintenance technician may be thoroughly competent at taxiing an aircraft at the airfield where he is based but what happens when that same technician is flown to a different airport to assist in repairing an aircraft and, is then, expected to reposition that aircraft after it has been repaired? That technician is now faced with an unfamiliar airport layout, unfamiliar gates, unfamiliar radio procedures, unfamiliar radio frequencies and unfamiliar airport operations (ramp control procedures, hours of tower operations, multiple ground control frequencies, etc.). There is also the very real possibility that he has been awake all night repairing the aircraft and the weather at the airfield is not good.

What are some safe operational techniques for maintenance personnel to use while taxiing or towing an aircraft?

- Always use a current airport diagram or taxiway chart
- Write down lengthy clearances
- Pay attention to and read back all runway hold short instructions
- Read back clearances in full
- DON'T ASSUME. Verify all unclear or misunderstood clearances
- Use “maintenance” in your call sign
- If regular VHF/COM failure is experienced expect light gun signals from the tower
- Demand Airport Movement/Safety Area Training from the Airport or your employer
- Activate aircraft navigation lights, beacon light and LOGO light when repositioning aircraft
- Request that Airport Operations escort all maintenance taxi or tow operations if they are to cross active runways

For further information regarding safe standards for maintenance crews repositioning aircraft in the movement area contact Dr. Paul M. Foster, Runway Safety and Operational Services, Western-Pacific Region (Paul.M.Foster@faa.gov).

QUARTERLY STATISTICS

HOW ARE WE DOING?

Vehicle/Pedestrian Deviation Tracking in the Western-Pacific Region

Calendar Quarter 2006				Calendar Quarter 2007			
Month	Vehicle	Pedestrian	V/PD	Month	Vehicle	Pedestrian	V/PD
Apr	2	3	5	Apr	*5	3	8
May	*4	1	5	May	*4	2	6
June	5	1	6	June	7	1	8
Total	11	5	16	Total	16	6	22

(*Includes 1 aircraft under maintenance tow)

(*Includes 2 aircraft under tow and 2 tugs assisting disabled aircraft)

Total V/PDs in the Western-Pacific Region in the calendar year 2005: 78

Total V/PDs in the Western-Pacific Region in the calendar year 2006: 44

Total V/PDs in the Western-Pacific Region in the calendar year 2007 to date: 48

*All statistical data supplied by the AT Quality Assurance database.

For more information Airport Managers may consult the following sources of information:

CERTALERT No. 04-05

http://www.faa.gov/airports_airtraffic/airports/airport_safety/certalerts/

Tug and Tow 101 Training CD-FAA Safety Guide for mechanics and ramp personnel who tug and tow aircraft

<http://www.faa.gov/runwaysafety/order/>

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Reproductions of this and subsequent issues of Vanquishing the VPD are available on FAA Website:

http://www.faa.gov/airports_airtraffic/airports/regional_guidance/western_pacific/airports_resources/newsletter/