Federal Aviation Administration

Memorandum

Date: NOV 17 2008

To: Managers, District Offices, Technical Services, Technical Operations, Western Service Area (WSA)

From: Manager, Engineering Services, Technical Operations, WSA R. Kitson

Subject: Visual Glide Slope Indicators and Abnormal Airport Environments (AAE)

Airports owners must maintain and improve runways and taxiways, and as a result there will be occasional runway closures and temporary threshold relocations. During runway closures, personnel and equipment may be present on the runway, or there may be other conditions which make it unsafe for an aircraft to land. Pilots are notified of runway closures through a Notice to Airmen (NOTAM), and notification on the Automated Terminal Information System where available. Airports will sometimes but not always mark the closed surface or relocated threshold. An airport with a closed or shortened runway surface is considered to have an AAE.

Visual Glide Slope Indicators (VGSI) help pilots establish a stabilized approach at altitudes above terrain. These facilities are critical safety aids and help prevent accidents. A pilot using these aids for navigation expects to land safely at the touchdown point. When a surface is closed leaving the visual glide slope operating, this may lead the pilot to believe that it is safe to land. This is an erroneous indication which meets the definition of hazardously misleading information. If an aircraft lands on the runway, they may encounter obstacles or other hazardous conditions. It is not uncommon to find, after an incident, that a pilot has failed to review the NOTAM for the airport. The Office of Runway Safety has seen cases of pilots landing on closed runways or closed portions of runways where the VGSI has been left operating.

It is the policy of the Flight Standards Divisions in AAL, ANM, AWP, and WSA Technical Operations, that any VGSI servicing a closed runway MUST be turned off or disabled throughout the duration of the closure to avoid hazardous safety risks during AAE. A visual aid may be disabled by having airport operations cover the lights so the indicators are not visible to pilots. Exceptions are allowed when agreed on by Operations Engineering, Flight Standards, Flight Procedures, and Terminal Services. Exceptions shall be documented in writing.

Temporary runway closures that cannot practically be scheduled in advance, and that are of very limited duration, represent a blanket exception to this policy. Some examples are: runway inspection, snow removal, or a disabled aircraft. These closures are limited in duration and are not scheduled far enough in advance to provide an opportunity to shut off the navigation systems.

Please refer any questions to Calvin Ngo, Operations Engineering/Navaids Support Center Manager, AJW-W15A, at (425) 227-2345 or Greg Weatherford, at (425) 227-2353.