
VOLUME 3. AIR OPERATOR TECHNICAL ADMINISTRATION

CHAPTER 6. OPERATIONAL CONTROL

SECTION 3. PART 121 FLIGHT RELEASE SYSTEMS AND SUPPLEMENTAL OPERATING RULES

1203. GENERAL. This section contains information for inspectors about part 121 flight release systems and about the release of flights under the part 121 requirements applicable to supplemental air carriers and commercial operators within the contiguous U.S.

A. Flight Followers. Under Title 14 of the Code of Federal Regulations (14 CFR) part 121, section 121.537, the pilot-in-command (PIC) and the operator's director of operations are jointly responsible for the initiation, continuation, diversion, and termination of a flight. While the director of operations may delegate the authority to perform operational control functions to other persons, the director retains the responsibility. For purposes of this handbook, these persons are termed flight followers.

(1) Section 121.537(a)(2) requires that the name of each flight follower the operator uses be listed in the operator's general operations manual (GOM).

(2) Supplemental operators may contract with other operators or organizations to provide certain elements of an operational control system, such as communications, flight following. In such a case, the name of each employee of the contracting organization authorized to provide such elements of operational control must be listed in the operator's GOM.

B. Release Authority. PICs are responsible for preflight planning and for the safe conduct of the flight. 14 CFR part 121, § 121.597 prohibits a supplemental flight from departing, however, without the specific concurrence of the flight follower. A flight release containing the specific conditions under which the flight will be conducted must be prepared. The PIC must sign the flight release before the flight may depart. Section 121.597(b) prohibits the PIC from signing until the flight follower concurs that the flight can be safely conducted as planned. Inspectors must ensure that the operator's GOM contains specific procedures to ensure that the operator, the PICs, and

the flight followers are in compliance with this requirement. Unless the PIC decides it is unsafe to do so, the PIC must conduct the flight in accordance with the flight release.

C. Flight-Monitoring. The operator's director of operations is responsible for monitoring the progress of each flight from its point of origin to its arrival at the destination, including its arrival and departure from intermediate stops. Section 121.537(c) requires that the director of operations take action to delay, divert, or cancel a flight when, in the opinion of the director of operations or the PIC, the flight cannot be operated safely as scheduled. The director of operations or a flight follower acting in behalf of the director of operations must actively review the conditions surrounding each flight to comply with this requirement. In the case of an emergency arising during flight, known to a flight follower, the PIC must be contacted and advised of the situation. The PIC's decision on a course of action must be obtained and the PIC's decision recorded. If a flight follower cannot contact the PIC, the flight follower shall declare an emergency and take any action the flight follower considers to be necessary under the circumstances.

D. Demonstration of Flight Follower Competence. 14 CFR part 121, § 121.127(b) requires that the operator show that each individual authorized to conduct operational control is able to perform the required duties. This rule applies to both employees of the operator and to contract personnel the operator authorizes to perform required duties. The preferred means an operator may use to meet this requirement is to establish a flight follower training and qualification program, which includes competency checks, and which meets the requirements of chapter 5 of this volume.

1205. FAMILIARITY WITH WEATHER CONDITIONS, FACILITIES, AND SERVICES.

Under part 121 supplemental rules, a PIC may not begin a flight unless the pilot in command (PIC) is thoroughly familiar with reported and forecasted weather conditions on the route to be flown and until the PIC has obtained all available reports on airport conditions and irregularities of navigation facilities that may affect the safety of the flight. During the flight, the PIC must obtain any additional available information on meteorological conditions and facilities that may affect the safety of the flight. The operator is responsible for ensuring that the PIC has the means to obtain this information. The operator is not required to be able to establish in-flight radio communications with the flight to deliver this information. One acceptable means an operator may use to obtain this information and to comply with this requirement is to contract with a commercial communications service provider.

1207. FLIGHT RELEASE SYSTEM FACILITIES.

Each supplemental operator must have an approved flight release system. The flight release system the operator uses must be described or referenced in paragraph A8 of the operator's OpSpecs. Most flight release systems are too complex to be described in a single paragraph; therefore, the preferred practice is for the system to be described in the operator's GOM, and referenced in paragraph A8 of the operator's OpSpecs.

A. The operator must provide one or more flight release centers to control and monitor the progress of each flight. Each flight release facility must be equipped with communications for monitoring the departure of each flight from the point of origin to its arrival at destination (including intermediate stops, diversions, and delays). Communications may be made by means of private facilities (such as company radio) or commercial facilities (such as telephone, telex, or radio). Operators are not required to provide the capability to contact flights en route by radio. Communications are normally considered adequate when the flight follower can transmit a message to a PIC who is on the ground at the departure, destination, or intermediate point and can then receive confirmation of receipt of that message within 15 minutes.

B. 14 CFR part 121, § 121.125(b) authorizes supplemental operators to contract with other organizations to provide operational control functions. The operator is responsible for ensuring the adequacy

of all facilities, access to communications and information sources, the adequacy of policies and procedures, and the competency of flight followers (whether or not they are provided by the operator or a contracting party).

C. Flight followers are not required to be certified aircraft dispatchers; however, POIs should strongly encourage operators to employ certified personnel in this capacity.

D. Inspectors must ensure that the operator's GOM contains adequate policy, guidance, and procedures for operational control personnel to perform their assigned duties, comply with regulatory requirements, and to ensure safe operations in normal, abnormal, and emergency circumstances. Flight followers must be familiar with, and have access to, the operator's GOM when on duty.

1209. FLIGHT RELEASE FORM. A flight release form must be completed before each flight. 14 CFR part 121, § 121.689(c) requires that each flag or domestic air carrier conducting operations under supplemental rules must use flight dispatch forms required for scheduled operations. Section 121.689(a) specifies that a flight release must contain at least the following information:

- Company or organization name
- Make, model, and registration number of the aircraft being used
- Flight or trip number
- Date of flight
- Name of each flight crewmember, flight attendant, and the pilot designated as PIC
- Departure airport, destination airport, and alternate airports
- Route of flight
- Minimum fuel supply (in gallons or pounds)
- Type of operation (such as IFR and VFR)
- Weather reports, available weather forecasts (or a combination thereof) for the destination airport and alternate airports that are the latest available at the time the flight release is signed (These must be printed on, or attached to, the flight release.)

1211. WEATHER REQUIREMENTS FOR FLIGHT RELEASE WITHIN THE CONTIGUOUS STATES. Inspectors must ensure that operators are aware of the weather requirements for the release of supplemental flights within the contiguous states. Section 4 of this chapter contains a discussion of flight release requirements for the release of flights to, from, or outside the contiguous states.

A. Flight Release under VFR. A supplemental flight may not be released for VFR operations unless the ceiling and visibility en route and at the destination airport are VFR and will remain above applicable VFR minimums until the aircraft arrives at the airport or airports specified in the flight release (see chapter 6, section 2, paragraph 1283).

NOTE: Part 121 flights may not be released under VFR rules unless specifically authorized by paragraph B33d of the OpSpecs (see volume 3, section 4, paragraph 125).

B. IFR Takeoff Weather Minimums. 14 CFR part 121, § 121.651(a) prohibits the release of a flight when the weather at the departure airport is reported to be less than the takeoff minimums specified in paragraph C56 of the operator's OpSpecs. The weather conditions may, however, be below the landing minimums specified in the operator's OpSpecs at the departure airport, in which case the flight may not be released unless the following conditions exist:

(1) For a two-engine airplane, an alternate airport is available which is not more than 1 hour from the departure airport at normal cruising speed, in still air, and with one engine inoperative.

(2) For an airplane with three or more engines, an alternate airport is available which is not more than 2 hours from the departure airport at normal cruising speed, in still air, and with one engine inoperative.

(3) The takeoff alternate airport is listed on the flight release.

(4) The weather conditions at the designated takeoff alternate airport meet the requirements of paragraph C55 of the operator's OpSpecs.

C. Destination Weather - IFR Operations. 14 CFR part 121, § 121.613 prohibits an operator from releasing a supplemental flight under IFR or over-the-top rules unless the weather reports and forecasts indicate that the weather will be at or above minimums required by the OpSpecs at the destination airport at the estimated time of arrival. Category I minimums are

given in paragraphs C53 and C54 of the OpSpecs. Category II and III minimums are given in paragraphs C59 and C60 of the OpSpecs, respectively.

D. Alternate Weather. 14 CFR part 121, § 121.623(a) prohibits an operator from releasing a supplemental flight within the contiguous states under IFR or over-the-top rules unless at least one alternate airport is listed in the flight release for each destination airport.

1213. FUEL SUPPLY - OPERATIONS IN THE CONTIGUOUS STATES. Inspectors must be aware of the fuel requirements for a flight release under supplemental rules within the contiguous states (see section 4 of this chapter for fuel requirements in extended overwater operations and for operations to, from, or outside the contiguous states). The fuel planning provisions of 14 CFR part 121, § 121.643 apply to all nonturbine and turbo propeller supplemental flights. 14 CFR part 121, § 121.645 applies to turbojet-powered supplemental flights. The provisions of §§ 121.643 and 121.645 are identical in reference to operations within the contiguous states.

NOTE: Part 121, section 121.647 applies to all operations conducted under part 121.

A. Required Fuel Supply. An operator may not release a flight or takeoff unless, considering winds and forecast weather conditions, the flight carries all of the following types of fuel:

(1) *En Route Fuel.* That fuel necessary for a flight to reach the airport to which it is released and then to conduct one instrument approach and a possible missed approach.

(2) *Alternate Fuel.* That fuel necessary for a flight to fly from the point of completion of the missed approach at the destination airport to the most distant alternate airport, make an IFR approach (if the forecast indicates such conditions will exist), and then complete a landing.

(3) *Domestic Reserve Fuel.* That fuel necessary for a flight to fly for 45 minutes at normal cruising fuel consumption.

(4) *Contingency Fuel.* That fuel necessary for a flight to compensate for any known traffic delays and to compensate for any other condition that may delay the landing of the flight.

NOTE: The operator's GOM should contain specific policies and instructions to both flight

followers and PICs for computing the amount of contingency fuel to be carried under the circumstances likely to be encountered in the operator's specific operation.

B. Departure Fuel. Sections 121.643 and 121.645 require that the fuel listed in previous subparagraph A be on board the aircraft at takeoff. The flight release must include this amount. The operator's GOM should clearly state this point to pilots, flight followers, and load planners. An additional increment of fuel for start-up, taxi, and predeparture delays must be included in the fuel load on board the aircraft at engine start.

1215. AMENDMENT OF A FLIGHT RELEASE.

In the absence of an emergency, a flight may only proceed to the destination to which it was originally released. If the flight is unable to land at the original destination, it may only proceed to the designated alternate airport. 14 CFR part 121, section 121.631 allows, however, for an original flight release to be amended while the flight is en route. An amendment may become necessary or desirable because the conditions under which the flight was released have changed (unplanned re-release) or because it may have been planned before departure.

A. Destination Weather Requirements While En Route. 14 CFR part 121, section 121.603(b) requires that PIC's shall obtain any information on weather and facilities that may affect the safety of flight while flights are airborne. Part 121 does not prohibit a flight from continuing toward a destination which has gone below landing minimums or one which is forecast to be below landing minimums at the ETA by a forecast issued after the flight has departed. For example, there may be enough fuel on board to hold overhead the destination until the weather is forecast to improve. 14 CFR part 121, section 121.627(a) does, however, prohibit the flight from continuing to the destination when, in the opinion of the PIC, it is unsafe to do so. POI's should ensure that the operator's GOM provides guidance to both PIC's and flight followers for dealing with these circumstances.

B. Alternate Weather Requirements While En Route. Section 121.631(b) prohibits the flight from continuing to a destination airport unless the weather conditions at the alternate airport (specified in the flight release) are forecast to be at or above the required alternate minimums at the ETA at the alternate airport.

(1) An alternate airport may be named which is below alternate minimums at the time of release, but which is forecast to be above minimums at the ETA. POIs should ensure that the operator's GOM contains specific procedures, however, for notifying the PIC and for monitoring the weather at the alternate airport when the selected alternate airport is below minimums at departure. These procedures may require the designation of a second alternate airport or that contingency fuel must be carried on the flight.

(2) Conditions other than ceiling and visibility can affect minimums, such as navigational aids, runway lighting, and snow removal operations. PICs and flight followers must monitor these factors, as well as ceiling and visibility, at designated alternate airports.

(3) When weather conditions permit, many operators release flights without an alternate airport. In some instances, while the flight is en route, destination weather may deteriorate to below what was used to release the flight and to the point that an alternate airport would have been required. The operator's GOM must contain direction and guidance to PICs and flight followers on how to manage such a situation.

(4) The flight release may be amended while the aircraft is en route to include any airport as an alternate that has the following:

- Authorization for that type of aircraft
- Is within the fuel range of the aircraft
- Alternate airport landing weather minimums

C. Requirements to Amend a Flight Release.

Section 121.631(c) requires that before a destination airport or an alternate airport may be changed, the following requirements must be met:

(1) The change must be jointly approved by the PIC and the flight follower.

(2) The PIC must be thoroughly familiar with reported and forecast weather conditions (including adverse weather) and the status of communications, navigation, and airport facilities.

(3) The destination and alternate airports specified in the amended release must be forecast to be above the weather minimums required in the oper-

ator's OpSpecs for the destination and alternate airports, respectively, at the ETA.

(4) The aircraft must have sufficient fuel on board at the time and point that the release was amended to complete the flight in compliance with the applicable fuel requirements.

(5) Each person who amends a flight release must record that amendment.

D. Pre-Planned Amendment of a Flight Release. A part 121 operator may only conduct planned re-release operations when authorized by paragraph B44 of the operator's OpSpecs. Section 4 of this chapter contains a discussion of planned re-release procedures. In domestic operations within the contiguous states, any operator can conduct a pre-planned amendment of a flight release. Only operators authorized to conduct extended overwater operations under paragraph B44 of

the OpSpecs, however, can conduct a pre-planned, re-release operation.

NOTE: Paragraph B044 does not apply to the amendment of flight plans for domestic operations within the contiguous states.

1217. EN ROUTE TERRAIN CLEARANCE.

Subpart I of part 121 contains the limitations on weights at which aircraft may be released due to terrain clearance requirements. While these limitations apply to all types of aircraft operated under part 121, they are particularly restrictive to two-engine aircraft operated in the western part of the U.S. Inspectors should be aware that to meet the limitations of Subpart I, operators may be required to limit takeoff weights or to list en route alternate airports on the flight release (see volume 4, chapter 3 of this handbook).

1218. - 1228. RESERVED.

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