

Enhanced Special Reporting Service (eSRS)

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

1. Question: What is eSRS?

Answer: Enhanced Special Reporting Service (eSRS) is designed to improve upon traditional SAR efforts through the use of GPS tracking devices. This service incorporates satellite communications technology into traditional Flight Service activities. Special Reporting Service (also called Hazardous Area Reporting Service) is an established program to track pilots operating in hazardous areas by maintaining frequent contact on the radio. eSRS expands that program to include position reporting via satellites instead of VHF radios, using lightweight electronics carried in the aircraft. eSRS does not replace a flight plan, but allows pilots to augment and enhance the benefits of a VFR Flight Plan.

2. Question: What are the benefits of eSRS?

Answer: It is anticipated that eSRS will expedite the SAR process. Alert notifications are transmitted directly to FSS, reducing the response time in the event of an emergency. Alert messages include the location of the aircraft in distress, allowing rescue assets to go directly to the aircraft location. Individual benefits differ based on the equipment used by the pilot. See other FAQs for details.

3. Question: What equipment is required to participate in eSRS?

Answer: Spidertrack and SPOT devices are the only two GPS flight tracking products presently tested and approved for this service. Devices may be hard wired or portable. Additional devices from other manufacturers may be added in the future.

4. Question: What else do I need to participate?

Answer: You must have a Master Flight Plan on file with an Alaskan FSS that includes information about the satellite tracking device you are using and the phrase “eSRS Participant” in the Remarks field. Once you have filed or updated your Master Flight Plan, Flight Service will provide information regarding the set-up of your tracking device to communicate directly with the Alaska Flight Service Program. That information will include email and text message addresses for input into your tracking device profile.

5. Question: How do I set up my SPOT Messenger device to participate in eSRS?

Answer: After including your SPOT Messenger information in your Master Flight Plan, you will receive instructions from the Alaska Flight Service Program on how to set up your user account to allow messages to be received directly by Flight Service.

6. Question: How do I set up my Spidertracks device to participate in eSRS?

Answer: After including your Spidertracks device in your Master Flight Plan, you will receive instructions from the Alaska Flight Service Program on how to set up your contacts to send messages directly to Flight Service.

7. Question: Do I have to be on a Flight Plan to participate in this program?

Answer: Yes. Pilots must be on a VFR flight plan to participate in this program. Should your satellite tracker fail, the expiration time on your flight plan will still initiate Search and Rescue (SAR) procedures. If an alert is received for an aircraft on a flight plan, Flight Service will expedite SAR procedures. Alerts that cannot be tied to a Flight Plan will be forwarded to the Rescue Coordination Center for further action.

8. Question: Is this service available outside Alaska?

Answer: No. This service is available for VFR aircraft on flights within Alaska only.

9. Question: Can I activate or change my flight plan via SPOT or Spidertracks messages?

Answer: No. Activating or changing a flight plan requires positive two-way communications with Flight Service. Unanticipated route changes or significant changes to your ETA should be relayed to Flight Service via two-way radio or telephone. At this time FSS does not have the ability to respond to requests requiring two-way communications via satellite.

10. Question: Is an "I'm OK/Alert Cancelled" message sufficient to close a VFR flight plan?

Answer: No. Flight plan closure requires positive two-way communications. At this time FSS does not have the ability to respond to requests requiring two-way communications via satellite.

11. Question: How do I sign up for the eSRS Program?

Answer: You must have a Master Flight Plan on file with FSS to participate in the eSRS program. You may file a Master Flight Plan with any Alaskan FSS. You must

include "eSRS Participant" in the "Remarks" block of the Master Flight Plan. Once you have a Master Flight Plan on file you will be sent additional program materials required to set up your device.

12. Question: How do I know when I can start participating in the program?

Answer: Once you have received the device-specific instructions from Flight Service and programmed your satellite tracking device with the phone number and email address provided, you will be a registered participant in the program.

13. Question: What happens if the Alert Messaging of my device doesn't work?

Answer: Maintenance outages or other system problems may prevent your alert message from being transmitted to Flight Service. Your VFR flight plan will still protect you in the same way it does now: Flight Service will initiate Search and Rescue procedures for overdue aircraft.

14. Question: I sold my satellite tracker. Who should I notify at FSS?

Answer: If you no longer wish to participate in the program contact any Flight Service Station in Alaska. All contact information for Flight Service should be deleted from your tracking device's profiles before the device is sold.

15. Question: Will Flight Service be watching every move I make?

Answer: The only time Flight Service will get information about your location is when we receive an alert message. In the case of a SPOT Tracker, that includes only the latitude and longitude of the device. If you have a Spidertracks device, we receive a message with your location and a link to the last flight track leading to that location. Otherwise, Flight Service does not know the specifics of your flight beyond what you put in your flight plan.

16. Should I use the "Spiderwatch" function on my Spidertracks device?

We strongly recommend using Spiderwatch in conjunction with eSRS. If you do, and something unexpected happens that causes your aircraft to come to a stop, Spiderwatch will automatically send alert messages to your designated contacts, including Flight Service.

If you do not use Spiderwatch, you must be conscious after an accident in order to start an immediate rescue. Additionally, Flight Service would need to reach the contacts listed on your Master Flight Plan in order to gain access to your latest flight track.