



FAA

Aviation Safety

Memorandum

Date:

To: Office of Airports, Airports Regional and Districts Offices, Washington DC

From: Mark Steinbicker, Manager, Flight Technologies and Procedures Division

Subject: September 2020 Revision Low-Visibility Operations/Surface Movement Guidance and Control Systems Inspections during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Purpose:

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide a temporary modified inspection/review method of established Low-Visibility Operations/Surface Movement Guidance and Control Systems (LVO/SMGCS) airport operations during the COVID-19 pandemic and supersedes the April 29, 2020 memo with the subject Low-Visibility Operations/Surface Movement Guidance and Control Systems (LVO/SMGCS) Inspections during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The intent is to work with stakeholders in the Office of Airports, Airports Regional and District Offices, and appropriate Airport Traffic (ATO) representatives to ensure continued success of LVO/SMGCS operations throughout the National Air Space (NAS).

The FAA is currently in Phase I of the COVID recovery plan found at <https://my.faa.gov/go/recovery>. These phases are condition-based and not tied to a specific timeline. This is to ensure when we do come back to the workplace, we do it with consistency and transparency based on data-driven criteria. Once travel restrictions are lifted Flight Standards proposes a 90-day get-well window to resume on-site LVO SMGCS inspections in compliance with FAA Order 8000.94, Procedures for Establishing Airport Low Visibility Operations and Approval of Low-Visibility Operations/Surface Movement Guidance and Control System Operations.

Discussion and Recommendation:

A team of Flight Standards subject matter experts (SMEs) conducted a review of FAA Order 8000.94 and FAA Advisory Circular 120-57, Surface Movement Guidance and Control System (SMGCS).

The terms of inspections/reviews contained in these documents mandates periodic on-site airport inspections by FAA Flight Standards every 12 to 18 months (FAA Order 8000.94 paragraph 9.a.). This specified time period gives Flight Standards flexibility to change the timing of the LVO/SMGCS inspections relative to the imposed travel restrictions on Federal employees related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 travel restrictions dictate the need to accomplish virtual inspection reviews with Flight Standards managing an online meeting in collaboration with the airport working group/other FAA representatives for the duration of this crisis. Following the termination of current COVID-19 travel restrictions, the inspection/review status will be revisited. AC 120-57 paragraph 7. RESPONSIBILITIES. b. Flight Standards – Flight Procedures and Airspace Group. (3) On- Site Inspection supports the flexible approach recommended here by the SMEs.

FAA SAFO 20005, Temporary Parking of Overflow Aircraft states that “As domestic airlines work to find space to park up to 50% of their fleet, airport operators are working to find locations to support temporary overflow aircraft.” More than likely SMGCS routes will be impacted by these aircraft and close attention to this and the proximity of aircraft to ILS localizer and glideslope signals need to be addressed at future virtual SMGCS meetings. Airport Operations Managers should initiate a virtual meeting of the LVO/SMGCS working group to discuss issues impacting LVO/SMGCS operations.

https://www.faa.gov/other_visit/aviation_industry/airline_operators/airline_safety/safo/all_safos/media/2020/SAFO20005.pdf

In response to the COVID-19 travel restrictions, the Airport Authority responsible for their established LVO/SMGCS program should conduct their own day and night SGMCS inspections. In the event a significant change is discovered in the active LVO/SMGCS plan or Airport configuration, the SMGCS working group will mitigate any identified risks. Mitigations might include temporary suspension of the SMGCS plan, temporarily altering routing or eliminating operations on whatever portion of the airport that may be affected by the change. Adopted changes will be published and distributed to all SMGCS working group parties referenced in AC 120-57.

In light of current travel restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic Flight Standards recommends the following actions:

Flight Procedures and Airspace Group (FPAG) actions:

- Review LVO/SMGCS status list.
- Review and amend LVO/SMGCS calendar during present COVID-19 situation.
- Adjust for the COVID-19 period using virtual technology to conduct inspections/meetings with Airport LVO/SMGCS working groups. Resume LVO/SMGCS on-site inspections within 90 days once the FAA and local areas lift travel restrictions.

- Continue to provide airports an operational approval letter for LVO/SMGCS with a standardized paragraph stating:

Due to restricted travel imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Flight Standards Technologies and Procedures Division of the Federal Aviation Administration has elected to extend the scheduled on-site LVO/SMGCS inspection for eighteen months, to the end of the next inspection cycle on (date)_____.

A teleconference meeting was held on (date) _____, with representatives of FAA Flight Standards, XXX Airport District Office, XXX Airport Operator and XXX Air Traffic Control Tower (ATCT) or appropriate Air Traffic Organization (ATO) representative. The LVO/SMGCS plan currency and content was reviewed. No significant changes to the LVO/SMGCS plan or airport configuration have been made relative to the policies established in Advisory Circular 120-57, Surface Movement Guidance and Control System and FAA Order 8000.94, Procedures for Establishing Airport Low Visibility Operations and Approval of Low-Visibility Operations/Surface Movement Guidance and Control System Operations.

Airport/Air Traffic Authority actions:

- Work with the SMGCS working group and conduct their own LVO/SMGCS on-site inspections per FAA Order 8000.94 and AC 120-57.
- Airport Operations Managers should initiate a virtual meeting of the LVO/SMGCS working group to discuss issues impacting LVO/SMGCS operations.
- Report any discrepancies or findings to Mr. Wade E.K. Terrell, Manager, Flight Procedures and Airspace Group.

Regional Airports Division actions:

- Airport Certification Safety Inspectors (ACSI) will continue to review LVO/SMGCS requirements.

COVID-19 pandemic travel restrictions provide an opportunity to evaluate Safety Management Systems (SMS) methods and virtual communications technology for oversight of participating LVO/SMGCS airports. We believe that we can utilize FAA ASI and financial assets more efficiently using these methods and technologies during the COVID-19 pandemic and while still providing surveillance of airports with established LVO/SMGCS operations.