



Advisory Circular

**Subject: ICAO AIRCRAFT COMPANY
THREE-LETTER IDENTIFIER
AND/OR TELEPHONY DESIGNATOR
ASSIGNMENTS AND U.S. SPECIAL
TELEPHONY/CALL SIGNS**

**Date: 10/31/12
Initiated by: AJV-21**

AC No: 120-26K

1. PURPOSE.

Advisory Circular 120-26K defines the criteria and procedures for obtaining an International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) three-letter identifier and/or telephony designator assignment and for obtaining an FAA Special or Local telephony/call sign.

2. CANCELLATION.

Advisory Circular No. 120.26J, dated 1/1/05, is cancelled.

3. EXPLANATION OF CHANGES

a. FAA Order 7340.2 Section 4 was revised to incorporate three-letter identifiers and telephony designators for security reasons. New paragraphs combine and condense verbiage, add new procedures, and remove obsolete references. This Advisory Circular (AC) is updated to reflect the revision of FAA Order 7340.2 Section 4.

b. Use of plain English improves the clarity of this advisory circular.

c. E-mail Points of Contact (POC) are added. Air Traffic Organization (ATO) Aeronautical Information Management (AIM) Office, AJV-2, (callsigns@faa.gov) is the POC for ICAO three-letter identifiers, telephony designators and special telephony designators. The affected air traffic control (ATC) facility is the POC for local telephonies. The POC for the FAA Service Area is changed to the Air Traffic Organization Service Center Operations Support Group.

NOTE-

Air Traffic System Operations Security (9-ATOR-HQ-IFOS@faa.gov) is the POC for special telephony designators for government aircraft operators requiring law enforcement or national security handling. These special telephonies are not described in this AC.

d. This AC refers to company/organization, telephony, special telephony, and local telephony designators. However, the terms ICAO three-letter designator and ICAO three-letter identifier are used interchangeably in this AC.

e. Notification of change or release of three-letter company designator and/or telephony designator, under Changes in Company Status, is revised to include procedures applicable to Certificate Revocation/Cancellation or Inactivity.

4. RELATED READING MATERIALS

Additional information on three-letter identifiers, local telephony, and special telephony designators, may be found in FAA Order 7340.2, Contractions; FAA Order 7210.3, Facility Operation and Administration; FAA Order 7110.65 Air Traffic Control; Title 47 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), section 87.107; and ICAO Document 8585, Designators for Aircraft Operating Agencies, Aeronautical Authorities, and Services.

5. GENERAL.

a. This section contains information, direction and guidance to be used when requesting International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) company designators and telephony designators (call signs) for those operators and servicing organizations that request or are required to obtain designators. Commercial, domestic, and international operators use designators for air traffic control (ATC) operations.

b. The Air Traffic Organization (ATO) headquarters' (HQ) Aeronautical Information Management (AIM) Office (AJV-2) (callsigns@faa.gov) assigns the designators when the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) determines that designators are advantageous and operationally appropriate to the U.S. ATC system. In the interests of safety, AJV-2 reserves the right to revise or cancel a designator assignment when deemed necessary, such as in the event of confusion or misuse. The FAA will not assign a three-letter company/organization identifier nor its associated telephony designator without approval by ICAO for world-wide use.

c. The four types of designators are entitled and described as follows:

- 1.** Company/organization designator (ICAO three-letter designator);
- 2.** Telephony designator (used instead of phonetically pronouncing the three-letter company designator);
- 3.** Special telephony designator (special handling); and
- 4.** Local telephony designator (local visual flight rules (VFR) operations only).

6. COMPANY DESIGNATOR.

a. The company/organization designator, which consists of three letters, together with a flight number of one to four digits, serves as the aircraft identification in the ATC system. Company/organization designators are valid only for company business in accordance with the provisions of its operating certificate or servicing organization policies. Pilots will use standard identification procedures for personal flying. The company/organization designator serves as the aircraft identification for the ATC system in several situations. The company/organization designator and flight/trip number are used instead of the aircraft registration number for ATC security and operational purposes and may be used for the international telecommunications service when its use is advantageous.

b. ATO AJV-2 may assign a three-letter company designator to:

1. Scheduled aircraft operators that operate seven or more non-seasonal international air operations each week or at least 15 non-seasonal, domestic round-trip air operations each week;

2. Chartered aircraft operators that may require use of the Aeronautical Fixed Telecommunications Network (AFTN);

3. Aircraft operators that require an ICAO three-letter designator for security purposes; or

4. Flight service companies and organizations that meet none of these requirements but are deemed worthy of an ICAO three-letter designator (i.e., Veterans Airlift Command).

7. TELEPHONY DESIGNATOR.

a. The telephony designator (used instead of phonetically pronouncing the three-letter company/organization designator) is usually assigned by ATO AJV-2 at the same time as the ICAO three-letter designator. The call sign, together with a flight number, is the aircraft identification for radio voice communications with air traffic personnel.

b. The telephony designator should be phonetically pronounceable in English. The designator should not consist of more than two words and three syllables. Numbers and phonetic letters may not be assigned as part of a telephony designator; however, existing telephony designators which violate this rule will remain in effect.

c. Use of telephony designators:

1. Increase operational security and accountability;

2. Reduce online noise distractions that create similar sounding telephony designator confusion;
 3. Expedite air and ground communication, enhances auditory recognition, and reduces potential for mistakes in verbal communication; and
 4. Satisfy specific requirements for international flight operations.
- d. The operator must include a new or changed telephony designator in the “Remarks” section of the operator’s flight plans for at least 60 days following the new designator’s effective date.

8. SPECIAL TELEPHONY DESIGNATOR.

a. ATO may authorize a special telephony designator to enable special handling by ATC.

Examples of situations in which ATO may authorize a special designator include:

1. Federal, state, local, or tribal governmental organizations operating within the continental United States (CONUS);
2. Commemorative flight;
3. Large number of aircraft participating in an organized race;
4. Aircraft operating during emergencies or disasters; or
5. Aircraft that need special handling for security or test purposes.

b. Special telephony designators will normally be valid for a limited duration, corresponding to the event requiring special handling. In some cases, such as air races which occur on an annual basis, or assignments to government organizations which conduct on-going periodic operations, the designator will remain valid until cancelled.

c. A special identifier, from four to five letters, is assigned in conjunction with the special telephony. The special identifier, when pronounced, is the special telephony.

d. Operators will file flight plans using a flight identifier formed from the special identifier followed by numbers. The total length of the special identifier plus numbers must not exceed seven alpha-numeric characters. For example, a five-letter special identifier can be followed by one or two numbers, but not more. The special telephony followed by the number will be the radio identification for air traffic control.

9. LOCAL TELEPHONY DESIGNATOR.

a. A local telephony designator may only be used for communication with air traffic facilities signing a letter of agreement, and only during VFR operations; they cannot be used for filing flight plans.

b. Flight schools or other operators which operate predominantly in a limited airspace are encouraged to investigate a local telephony identifier if it will improve communications and enhance safety. (ICAO will not grant a three-letter identifier to this type of operator.)

10. PROCEDURES FOR ASSIGNMENT OF DESIGNATORS

All requests for designators (except local telephony) are made to the appropriate Service Center. ATO AJV-2 (callsigns@faa.gov) administers final designator assignment.

The Service Center website will provide the contact information for the Operations Support Group.

<http://servicearea.ato.faa.gov/> or

http://www.faa.gov/about/office_org/headquarters_offices/ato/service_units/sc/

NOTE-

Failure to submit required documentation may delay or prevent a designator assignment.

a. Company Designator/Telephony Designator.

The operator or service organization must submit the following information for a three-letter designator and the telephony designator request:

1. The name and address of operator or servicing organization;
2. The type of aircraft operation or service provided (a list of the operators served is required for service operations);
3. If applicable, a copy of the operator published flight schedule, monthly flight history, or projected flight schedule, highlighting international flight activity;
4. If applicable, a copy of the FAA certificate which authorizes the company's operations and states the 14 CFR part under which operations are to be conducted; and
5. Choices for requested telephony designators and corresponding three-letter identifiers, listed in their desired order. At least five choices are recommended to eliminate potential back-and-forth communications in the event a choice is not available/granted. Prior to submitting a telephony/three-letter request, the requestor should verify that their requested telephony/three-letter identifiers are not already in use by checking the following website:

http://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/publications/atpubs/CNT/3-3.htm#Section_2

6. It is preferred to have the three-letter identifier be suggestive of the telephony identifier. For example, HLO and HALO would be a good pair.

b. Special Telephony Designator.

Operators must submit the following information for the special telephony designator request:

NOTE-

Government aircraft operators (U.S. State, local, tribal, and law enforcement aircraft) with national security or law enforcement concerns desiring special telephony designators must contact Air Traffic System Operations Security via email at 9-ATOR-HQ-IFOS@faa.gov.

1. Type of flight;
2. Type of handling required;
3. Type and number of aircraft; and
4. Routes and duration of operation.

NOTE-

Special telephony designators do not receive a three-letter identifier.

c. Local Telephony Designator. Local telephony designators are used only for communications with air traffic facilities for VFR operations as specified in a letter of agreement (LOA) between the local facility or service area and the requesting applicant. The LOA will contain provisions to ensure that the applicant uses local telephony designators only with air traffic facilities that are signatories to the agreement. The appropriate service center must review the LOA, coordinate with the military liaison to ensure the designator is not in use, add its recommendations to the letter, and forward the signed LOA to ATO AJV-2. The service center or signatory air traffic facility will issue the signed LOA to the applicant.

**11. CHANGES IN COMPANY STATUS OR CERTIFICATE
REVOCATION/CANCELLATION OR INACTIVITY**

a. When an assigned three-letter company/organization designator and/or telephony designator is no longer required, the company/organization must notify ATO AJV-2 (callsigns@faa.gov) in writing. ATO AJV-2 may not reassign any designator it has released for at least 60 calendar days. Notification of change or release should be made when:

1. Operations are permanently suspended or cancelled;
2. Company/organization name or address changes; or
3. A single operating certificate is issued resulting in a company name holding more than one designator. (Typically one of the existing designators is retained, and the other is cancelled.)

b. Principal Operations Inspectors (POI) must notify ATO AJV-2 when a company operating certificate is revoked or surrendered.

c. If a company/organization fails to use a three-letter company designator or telephony designator for two years on an Instrument Flight Rules (IFR) flight plan in U.S.-controlled airspace, AJV-2 will place them on a watch list. AJV-2 will revoke and release any three-letter company/organization designator and telephony designator that is not used for three years on an IFR flight in U.S.-controlled airspace. Any requests for a waiver of this policy should be made in writing to AJV-2 (callsigns@faa.gov).

12. AERONAUTICAL FIXED TELECOMMUNICATIONS NETWORK (AFTN)

The AFTN system also uses ICAO three-letter designators for identification, communication, and billing purposes. The AFTN system is an integrated, international system of aeronautical fixed circuits. The AFTN system provides the exchange of messages and flight plans between aeronautical and fixed stations within the network.

13. EFFECTIVE DATE AND PUBLICATION

The required administrative period for approval of a three-letter company/organization and/or telephony designator is approximately 45 calendar days (beginning when the Service Center Operations Support Group receives all required documentation and requested telephonies). ATO AJV-2 establishes an effective date for the designator. ATO AJV-2 advises the FAA facilities affected that the newly assigned telephony/three-letter identifiers will be published in FAA and ICAO documents (the current editions of ICAO Doc 8585, Designators for Aircraft Operating Agencies, Aeronautical Authorities, and Services, and FAA Order JO 7340.2, Contractions).



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