



# Advisory Circular

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**Subject:** ASSIGNMENT OF AIRCRAFT  
CALL SIGNS AND ASSOCIATED  
TELEPHONIES

**Date:** AUG 25 2016  
**Initiated by:** ATO SYSTEM  
OPERATIONS SECURITY,  
AJR-2

**AC No:**  
**120-26L**

## SECTION 1. GENERAL INFORMATION

### 1.1. PURPOSE

This Advisory Circular describes the requirements and procedures for the assignment and authorization for use of aircraft call signs in the National Airspace System (NAS), specifically, International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) three-letter designators (3LD), U.S. special designators, and local designators, and their associated telephonies. Guidance is provided to aircraft operators for requesting call signs and explains the assignment and the authorization process for their use domestically within the NAS and internationally.

### 1.2. AUDIENCE

The audience for this Advisory Circular includes aircraft operators (both civil and governmental) and any other persons involved within the aviation community; Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Air Traffic Organization (ATO) employees; and FAA Flight Standards Services.

### 1.3. CANCELLATION

Advisory Circular 120.26K, dated 10/31/2012, is cancelled.

### 1.4. REGULATORY DOCUMENTS

The regulatory sources for the assignment and authorized use of call sign designators and associated telephonies are published in the following FAA ATO documents: FAA Order 7610.4, *Special Operations, Chapter 17, Section 2, Assignment of Call Signs and Associated Telephonies*; FAA Order 7210.3, *Facility Operation and Administration*; FAA Order 7110.65, *Air Traffic Control*; and FAA Notice 7610.XXX, *Assignment of Call Signs and Associated Telephonies*, (FAA Notice 7610.XXX will be effective until the procedures are published in FAA Order 7610.4).

## **1.5. RELATED READING AND REFERENCE MATERIALS**

**a.** Public listings of authorized ICAO 3LDs, U.S. special call sign designators, and associated telephonies are contained in Chapter 3 of FAA Order 7340.2, *Contractions*.

**b.** Additional information on aircraft call signs may be found in 47 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 87.107; and ICAO Document 8585, *Designators for Aircraft Operating Agencies, Aeronautical Authorities, and Services*.

## **1.6. EXPLANATION OF CHANGES**

**a.** FAA Order 7610.4, Chapter 17, Section 2, is now the source document for this advisory circular. FAA Notice 7610.XXX, *Assignment of Call Signs and Associated Telephonies*, is the reference document for this advisory circular until the changes are published in FAA Order 7610.4.

**b.** FAA Order 7340.2, Chapter 1, Section 3, will no longer contain the procedures for assignment of call signs. However, references to FAA Order 7610.4, Chapter 17, Section 2, and to this advisory circular will be provided in Chapter 1, Section 1.

**c.** Extensive changes to the request and assignment process for aircraft call sign designators and associated telephonies, particularly ICAO 3LDs, has prompted this revision. This revised advisory circular includes these procedural changes and provides guidance for FAA ATO, aircraft operators, and the aviation community in general, involved in the process of requesting, changing, and using aircraft call signs and associated telephonies in the NAS.

**d.** The ATO Aeronautical Information Management (AIM) office is changed to ATO Aeronautical Information Services (AIS).

**e.** All requests for U.S. special call signs are now submitted to ATO System Operations Security (9-ATOR-HQ-IFOS@faa.gov).

**f.** The format has been changed and plain language is used more extensively to improve the clarity of this advisory circular.

**g.** New paragraphs add new requirements and procedures and remove obsolete references.

**h.** When section and paragraph titles in this advisory circular refer to aircraft call signs, the sections and paragraphs will discuss both aircraft call sign designators and associated telephonies.

## **SECTION 2. AIRCRAFT CALL SIGNS EXPLAINED**

### **2.1. WHY AIRCRAFT CALL SIGNS ARE USED**

The ability of air traffic control (ATC) to positively identify aircraft is fundamental to ensuring the security and safety of the National Airspace System (NAS). The use of authorized call sign designators and associated telephonies also improves communication between pilots and ATC by reducing distractions and easing frequency congestion. The FAA ATO is responsible for ensuring that every call sign is properly assigned and authorized, clearly related to the type of operation permitted, and is used within the NAS in accordance with its authorization.

## **2.2. WHO CAN USE AN AIRCRAFT CALL SIGN**

Call sign designators and associated telephonies can be assigned and authorized by FAA ATO for U.S. registered civil aircraft, U.S. governmental aircraft, and certain U.S. military aircraft. Aircraft operated by commercial companies, government agencies, and private organizations may need call signs and telephonies for operations within the air traffic control (ATC) system. Flight servicing companies and organizations also need ICAO 3LDs for addressing flight messages.

## **2.3. TYPES OF AIRCRAFT CALL SIGNS**

The three types of call sign designators and telephonies authorized for use by FAA ATO and described in this advisory circular are as follows:

- a. International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) three-letter designator (3LD) and associated telephony;
- b. U.S. Special call sign designator and associated telephony; and
- c. Local call sign designator and associated telephony.

# **SECTION 3. BEFORE REQUESTING AN AIRCRAFT CALL SIGN**

## **3.1. REQUIREMENTS FOR ICAO THREE LETTER DESIGNATORS (3LD) AND ASSOCIATED TELEPHONIES**

a. ICAO three-letter designators (3LD) and associated telephonies are approved and assigned by ICAO, but authorized for use by FAA ATO. The requirements are as follows:

1) ICAO 3LDs and associated telephonies are valid only for use in accordance with the provisions set forth and specified in the following:

- a) Company operating certificate;
- b) Flight servicing organization procedures; or
- c) ATO instructions and security agreements.

2) Pilots are required to use standard identification procedures (i.e., aircraft registration number) when operating outside of such provisions.

3) The ICAO 3LD, together with a flight number (see paragraph 5.1.b. for more details), serves as the aircraft identification for the ATC system and is used instead of the aircraft registration number for ATC security and operational purposes.

4) ICAO 3LDs are used for international telecommunications services, including the Aeronautical Fixed Telecommunications Network (AFTN).

b. ICAO 3LDs and associated telephonies may be assigned to:

1) Scheduled 14 CFR Part 121 and Part 135 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;

**NOTE-**

1. Part 121 aircraft operators are governed by Title 14 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), specifically, 14 CFR 121 "Operating Requirements: Domestic, Flag, and Supplemental Operations."

2. Part 135 aircraft operators are governed by Title 14 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), specifically, 14 CFR 135 "Operating Requirements: Commuter and On Demand Operations and Rules Governing Persons on Board Such Aircraft."

2) Chartered 14 CFR aircraft operators engaged in commercial international flight operations or at least 15 non-seasonal domestic air operations each week.

3) Organizations, such as corporations, flight servicing companies, government agencies, and charitable organizations.

4) ICAO 3LDs and associated telephonies cannot be used by third parties unless permission is explicitly granted through a security agreement with ATO System Operations Security.

**3.2. REQUIREMENTS FOR U.S. SPECIAL CALL SIGNS**

Special call sign designators and associated telephonies may be assigned and authorized by FAA Air Traffic Organization (ATO) to enable special handling by ATC within the National Airspace System (NAS). ATO System Operations Security determines if special call sign designators and associated telephonies are advantageous and operationally appropriate for use in the NAS.

a. Special call sign designators and associated telephonies may be authorized for the following type of flight, operation, or event:

- 1) Governmental aircraft operations (Federal, state, local, tribal, and law enforcement);
- 2) Civil aircraft supporting emergencies, disasters, or law enforcement activities;
- 3) Civil aircraft that need special handling (e.g., commemorative flights or test purposes);
- 4) Civil aircraft participating in an organized event; or
- 5) Nationally recognized flight schools.

b. Special call sign designators can be used for filing flight plans and may be issued for a designated area of operation corresponding to the duration of an event or circumstances requiring special handling.

c. Special call sign designators are comprised of four to five characters. The special call sign designator combined with the flight number serves as the aircraft identification for the ATC system; must not exceed 7 total characters; and is used instead of the aircraft registration number for ATC security and operational purposes.

d. The special call sign designator, when pronounced, is normally the telephony unless a unique telephony is assigned by the ATO office processing the request.

e. Pilots are required to use standard identification procedures (i.e., aircraft registration number) when operating outside of the special call sign authorization.

f. Special call sign designators and associated telephonies cannot be used by third parties unless permission is explicitly granted through a security agreement with ATO System Operations Security.

### **3.3. REQUIREMENTS FOR LOCAL CALL SIGNS**

In accordance with FAA Order 7210.3, Facility Operation and Administration (paragraph 4-4-2, Use of Aircraft Call Signs):

- a. Local call sign designators and associated telephonies are used only for local flight operations as specified in a letter of agreement (LOA) between the local air traffic control (ATC) facility and the requesting aircraft operator; and
- b. The local ATC facility will provide the FAA requirements for requesting local call sign designators and associated telephonies.

## **SECTION 4. HOW TO REQUEST AN AIRCRAFT CALL SIGN**

### **4.1. REQUESTING ICAO THREE LETTER DESIGNATORS (3LD) AND ASSOCIATED TELEPHONIES.**

a. Aircraft operators must submit requests for ICAO 3LDs and associated telephonies to FAA ATO as follows:

- 1) Civil aircraft operators submit the request to ATO Aeronautical Information Services (AIS) via email ([callsigns@faa.gov](mailto:callsigns@faa.gov));

- 2) Governmental aircraft operators (Federal, State, local, tribal, and law enforcement aircraft) submit the request to ATO System Operations Security via email ([9-ATOR-HQ-IFOS@faa.gov](mailto:9-ATOR-HQ-IFOS@faa.gov))

b. Aircraft operators must submit the following information to the appropriate ATO office (listed above) for validation that the request meets FAA requirements:

- 1) The name and address of the aircraft operator or organization;
- 2) The type of aircraft operation or service provided by the company or organization;
- 3) If applicable, a copy of the civil aircraft operator's published or projected flight schedule, monthly flight history, and routes or areas of operation;
- 4) If applicable, a copy of the FAA certificate which authorizes the company's aircraft operations and states the 14 CFR part under which aircraft operations are to be conducted;
- 5) At least 5 proposed ICAO 3LDs and associated telephonies, listed in their desired order; and
- 6) Type of Transponder:
  - (a) Mode 3A/C;
  - (b) Mode S/ADS-B flight deck programmable; or
  - (c) Mode S/ADS-B non-flight deck programmable.

c. If the request does not meet FAA requirements, the ATO office processing the request will provide an explanation to the applicant.

**d.** If the request meets FAA requirements, ATO AIS will direct the civil applicant to the ICAO 3LD website (<http://www.icao.int/3LD>) or ATO System Operations Security will coordinate directly with ICAO for governmental applicants;

**NOTE-**

*ICAO charges a fee for registration or modification of a civil ICAO 3LD and associated telephony. Civil applicants risk forfeiting this fee if they apply on the ICAO 3LD website prior to ATO validating their request for an ICAO 3LD and associated telephony.*

**e.** ICAO will notify the civil applicant when an ICAO 3LD and associated telephony is approved and assigned, or disapproved; System Operations Security will make this notification to governmental applicants;

**NOTE-**

*ICAO approval and assignment does not authorize the use of an ICAO 3LD and associated telephony. Only ATO can provide this authorization.*

**f.** The ATO office processing the request will notify the applicant when an ICAO 3LD and associated telephony is authorized for use.

**g.** Aircraft operators requesting to modify an existing 3LD and associated telephony must follow the same assignment process as described in this paragraph. The same request process should also be used for modifications to aircraft operator information or 3LD cancellations.

#### **4.2. REQUESTING U.S. SPECIAL CALL SIGNS.**

**a.** Aircraft operators must submit requests for special call sign designators and associated telephonies to ATO System Operations Security via email (9-ATOR-HQ-IFOS@faa.gov).

**b.** Aircraft operators must submit the following information for validation that the request meets FAA requirements:

- 1) Type of flight, operation, or event;
- 2) Aircraft type and number of aircraft participating;
- 3) Purpose and description of flight, operation, or event;
- 4) Routes or areas of flight, operation, or event;
- 5) Duration of flight, operation, or event; and
- 6) Type of Transponder:
  - (a) Mode 3A/C;
  - (b) Mode S/ADS-B flight deck programmable; or
  - (c) Mode S/ADS-B non-flight deck programmable.

**c.** If ATO System Operations Security determines the request does not meet FAA requirements, an explanation will be provided to the applicant.

**d.** If the FAA requirements are met, governmental requests will be processed by ATO System Operations Security and civil requests will be processed by ATO Aeronautical Information Services (AIS) (callsigns@faa.gov).

**e.** The ATO office processing the request will approve, administer final assignment, and notify the applicant when the special call sign designator and associated telephony is authorized for use.

f. Aircraft operators requesting to modify or cancel any U.S. special call sign designator/associated telephony or related aircraft operator information should submit requests to System Operations Security (9-ATOR-HQ-IFOS@faa.gov).

#### 4.3. REQUESTING LOCAL CALL SIGNS

Aircraft operators must submit requests for local call sign designators and associated telephonies to the appropriate local FAA air traffic control (ATC) facility. (See paragraph 3.3. for more information).

## SECTION 5. RULES FOR USING AIRCRAFT CALL SIGNS

### 5.1 HOW TO USE ANY AUTHORIZED AIRCRAFT CALL SIGN

a. **Aircraft Identification.** The proper use of authorized call signs and telephonies is essential to ensuring the safety and security of the National Airspace System (NAS) by providing distinct aircraft identification for ATC. ATC identifies each of these aircraft within the NAS as follows:

1. When the call sign designator is combined with a flight number to make up the aircraft identification; and

2. When the telephony, in conjunction with the flight number, is used as the aircraft identification for radio communications with ATC.

b. **Use of Authorized Call Signs.** To ensure proper aircraft identification for ATC, the following requirements must be met for the use of authorized call signs in the NAS:

1. The combination of call sign designator and flight number must not exceed 7 alphanumeric characters;

2. To avoid similar or same call sign confusion, the call sign designator letters must immediately be followed in sequence only by the numerals of the flight number;

3. No additional letters of the alphabet are permitted after the call sign designator (except in b.4. below);

**NOTE-**

1. *Examples of acceptable call sign designators with flight number are: MDSTR1, RDDL172, ABX91, and SWA2604.*

2. *Examples of unacceptable call sign designators with flight number are: RDDL1720, NEWS42G , BKA16CH, and LBQ17523.*

4. For operational purposes, Part 121 and Part 135 scheduled aircraft operators may use a letter as the final character of the aircraft identification as long as it is preceded by a numeral (i.e., AAL351A);

5. The aircraft registration number must be listed in the Remarks section of the filed flight plan when an authorized ICAO 3LD, special call sign designator, or local call sign designator is used; and

6. If the aircraft is equipped with a Mode S or ADS-B transponder, the call sign must be set (programmed) in the transponder before takeoff.

**c. Use of Authorized Telephonies.** Telephonies are used, instead of phonetically pronouncing the call sign designator, for aircraft identification purposes and to expedite radio communication with ATC. To ensure proper aircraft identification for ATC, authorized telephonies must meet the following requirements for use in the NAS:

1. To avoid confusion of similar sounding call signs, the telephony must be distinct and dissimilar from other telephonies listed in FAA Order 7340.2, *Contractions*. The telephony should also incorporate the following characteristics:

(a) Ideally, the telephony should reflect a correlation between the call sign designator and the name of the aircraft operating agency or its function.

(b) To reduce potential for miscommunication with ATC, the telephony should be easy to pronounce in English, comprised of 1 or 2 words, and consist of two or three syllables.

2. An ICAO 3LD must not be used in phonetic form as the telephony. However, existing telephonies which violate this rule will remain in effect (e.g., UPS).

3. The aircraft operator must include a new or changed telephony in the "Remarks" section of their flight plans for at least 60 days following the effective date of the new telephony.

**d. ATC Responsibilities.** In accordance with FAA Order 7110.65, the abbreviation of FAA authorized call signs is not permitted; and similar-sounding call signs must be reported.

**REFERENCE-**

*FAA Order 7110.65, Air Traffic Control, paragraph 2-4-9.a., Abbreviated Transmissions*

*FAA Order 7110.65, Air Traffic Control, paragraph 2-4-15.b., Emphasis for Clarity*

## **5.2. RESOLUTION OF AIRCRAFT IDENTIFICATION PROBLEMS**

a. ATC facilities are responsible for taking the appropriate actions to resolve reports of occurrences involving aircraft identification problems in accordance with FAA Order 7210.3.

**REFERENCE-**

*FAA Order 7210.3, Facility Operation and Administration, paragraph 2-1-13, Aircraft Identification Problems*

b. Aircraft operators should report occurrences of aircraft identification problems, such as similar-sounding or duplicate call signs, to the ATC facility where the occurrence took place.

## **5.3. AUTHORITY TO REVISE OR CANCEL ANY AUTHORIZED CALL SIGN**

In the interests of ATM security and safety, the ATO reserves the right to revise, or cancel the assignment of any authorized call sign designator and/or associated telephony, particularly in the event of unauthorized use or confusion. Lack of use for three years or more may also result in cancellation of an ICAO 3LD and associated telephony.

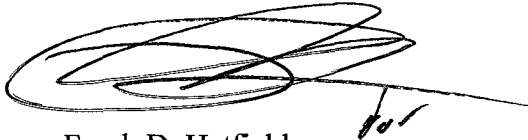
## **5.4. AERONAUTICAL FIXED TELECOMMUNICATIONS NETWORK (AFTN)**

The Aeronautical Fixed Telecommunications Network (AFTN) system uses ICAO three letter designators (3LD) for identification, communication, and billing purposes. The AFTN system is an integrated, international system of aeronautical communications networks. The AFTN system provides the exchange of messages and flight plans between aeronautical and fixed stations within the network. See ICAO document Annex 10 for information concerning AFTN.



**5.5. PUBLICATION**

The ATO office processing the request will send notification (via GENOT) of updates, modifications, and authorization dates for 3LDs, U.S. special call signs, and associated telephonics. GENOTs remain effective until the changes are published in FAA Order 7340.2.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Frank D. Hatfield  
Director, System Operations Security, AJR-2

25 August 2016

Date: