



U.S. Department
of Transportation
**Federal Aviation
Administration**

Advisory Circular

Subject: Lengthy Tarmac Delays and
Associated Airline/Airport Contingency Plans and
Related Air Traffic Control Communications

Date: April 29, 2010
Initiated by: Terminal
Safety and Operations
Support, AJT-2

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1. Purpose.

This advisory circular (AC) describes the communication process between a pilot-in-command of a tarmac delayed aircraft and local air traffic control (ATC). In addition, air carrier (Air Carrier Operations Center/Dispatch) communications related to tarmac delayed aircraft with the Air Traffic Control System Command Center (ATCSCC) are addressed.

2. To Whom Does This AC Apply?

This AC applies to operators of aircraft subject to the Department of Transportation (DOT) Enhanced Protections for Airline Passenger Rule in Title 14, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 259. This rule applies to all the flights of a certificated or commuter air carrier if the carrier operates scheduled passenger service or public charter service using any aircraft originally designed to have a passenger capacity of 30 or more seats. Certain exceptions apply for charter service. The rule does not apply to foreign air carriers. This AC may also apply to airport operators assisting in developing contingency plans for lengthy delays.

3. What is a Carrier Contingency Plan for Lengthy Tarmac Delays?

The DOT rule, commonly known as the “Three-hour Tarmac Rule,” requires each covered carrier to adopt a Contingency Plan for Lengthy Tarmac Delays for its scheduled and public charter flights at each large and medium U.S. hub airport at which it operates such air service and follow the plan’s terms. A tarmac delay means holding an aircraft on the ground either before takeoff or after landing with no opportunity for its passengers to deplane. In general, the carrier’s contingency plan will include assurances that for domestic flights, the air carrier will not permit an aircraft to remain on the tarmac for more than 3 hours unless the pilot-in-command determines there is a safety-related or security-related reason or ATC advises the carrier that returning to the gate or another disembarkation point elsewhere in order to discharge passengers would significantly disrupt airport operations. The DOT expects that carriers will work with airport operators to form the contingency plans. Full requirements are included in the text of the DOT rule.

4. What is the FAA/ATC Role with Tarmac Delayed Flights?

The FAA has issued directives to air traffic personnel pertaining to tarmac delay requests. These directives include a requirement to provide the requested service as soon as operationally practicable or advise the pilot-in-command that the requested service cannot be accommodated because it would create a significant disruption of air traffic operations.

a. ATC Facility Procedures. Procedural requirements have been included in FAA directives that apply to air traffic control and facility management and administration. The ATCSCC, en route facilities, and affected terminal facilities must develop procedures for handling requests related to tarmac delays.

Air traffic managers must ensure that those procedures are contained in a facility directive and are briefed annually. Facility procedures will vary from airport to airport depending on a variety of factors.

(1) What constitutes a significant disruption will vary by location due to many factors, such as runway configurations, available taxi routes, traffic volume and complexity, active runway crossings, etc.

(2) Phraseology. Expected phraseology from the controller to a tarmac delayed aircraft includes:

(Identification) TAXI TO (ramp, gate or alternate deplaning area) VIA (route).

or

(Identification) EXPECT A (number) MINUTE DELAY DUE TO (ground and/or landing and/or departing) TRAFFIC.

or

(Identification) UNABLE DUE TO OPERATIONAL DISRUPTION.

b. Air carriers and airport operators may find it beneficial to coordinate with air traffic terminal facilities as they develop their required lengthy tarmac delay contingency plans. In that way, air carriers and airport operators could consider the potential operational aspects of the alternatives to address tarmac delayed aircraft.

5. What is the Process to Advise ATC of a Tarmac Delayed Flight?

The pilot-in-command of a tarmac delayed aircraft is responsible for notifying the local air traffic control facility that action is requested to comply with the Three-hour Tarmac Rule. The request should be made in a timely manner so as to ensure compliance with the rule and reflect local operating conditions such as available taxiways or other aircraft movements. ATC is not responsible for ensuring operator compliance or for tracking the time individual flights are delayed. The request for action or clearance from the pilot-in-command to ATC should include the reason, such as "tarmac related delay," and the time by which the aircraft must be airborne or deplane passengers.

All airline communication regarding individual flights or airport status in relation to tarmac delay issues, other than communication between the pilot-in-command of a tarmac delayed aircraft and the local air traffic control facility, should be made to the ATCSCC and not the affected facility. Only the pilot-in-command is expected to initiate action with local ATC regarding a tarmac delayed aircraft.

6. How Can I Get This and Other FAA Publications?

You can view a list of all ACs at http://www.faa.gov/regulations_policies/advisory_circulars/. You can view the Code of Federal Regulations at http://www.faa.gov/regulations_policies/faq_regulations/.



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Date Signed