U.S. Department
of Transportation
Federal Aviation
Administration

SAFO

Safety Alert for Operators

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Flight Standards Service
Washington, DC

http://www.faa.gov/other_visit/aviation_industry/airline_operators/airline_safety/safo/all_safos

A SAFO contains important safety information and may include recommended action. Besides the specific action recommended in a SAFO, an alternative action may be as effective in addressing the safety issue named in the SAFO. The contents of this document do not have the force and effect of law and are not meant to bind the public in any way. This document is intended only to provide clarity to the public regarding existing requirements under the law or agency policies.

Subject: Risks Associated with Visual Approaches.

Purpose: This SAFO reminds air carrier operators and pilots of risks associated with visual approaches.

Background: In recent months, several notable and high visibility events have occurred in the National Airspace System (NAS) and the severity of these events is concerning. This SAFO applies to all air carrier operations under Title 14 of the Code of Federal Regulations (14 CFR) Parts 121 and 135.

Discussion: As the NAS continues to grow in use and complexity, efforts have been ongoing to prevent unsafe operations such as runway incursions, unstable approaches, altitude and route deviations, and runway identification errors. In light of recent events, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) identified the need to ensure all operators and pilots understand and evaluate the risks associated with the acceptance and execution of visual approaches.

The primary purpose of the Air Traffic Control (ATC) system is to prevent aircraft collisions. Effective communication between pilots and air traffic controllers is essential to achieving this safety goal. ATC supports the pilot-in-command's (PIC) authority to declare "unable" when a clearance reduces the safety margin. This includes, but is not limited to, vectors, speeds, or altitudes that increase pilot workload. Examples include unexpected vectors inside normal descent profiles, airspeed restrictions, and requests to:

- Use a runway as a taxiway;
- Use a shorter runway than expected;
- Conduct land-and-hold-short operations;
- Perform circling maneuvers associated with an instrument approach;
- Maneuver at low altitudes on a visual approach;
- Land with tailwinds or crosswinds that may increase risk to an unacceptable level;
- Execute Line Up and Wait clearances;
- Perform intersection takeoffs;

- Follow runway exit instructions onto intersecting runways during the landing roll; and
- Make changes to departure, arrival, approach, runway assignments, or requesting operators execute a visual approach.

Recommended Action: Directors of Operations, Chief Pilots, Directors of Training, Check Pilots, Directors of Safety, Pilots, and other operational personnel should review the following items and take any necessary steps to ensure operations are conducted at the highest level of safety. Utilizing Safety Management System (SMS) principles, certificate holders should evaluate changes to procedures or training to ensure PICs understand their authority for safe aircraft operation in accordance with 14 CFR Part 91, § 91.3. To mitigate risks associated with complex operations, operators and pilots should consider strategies such as:

- Methodologies for assuring increased vigilance while operating at airports with published Visual Flight Rules (VFR) routes in the vicinity of approach and departure paths.
- Requesting an instrument approach to reduce the likelihood of misalignment with VFR traffic, runways or taxiways and maintain a stabilized approach.
- Communicating "UNABLE" to ATC if there is inadequate time to recalculate landing performance, reconfigure avionics, brief the new approach procedure, or stabilize the approach.
- Maintaining an active visual scan to avoid potential conflicts. Due to radar limitations, volume of traffic, controller workload or communications frequency congestion, Air Traffic Control may be unable to provide traffic information services. Pilots should consider requesting information about other aircraft including azimuth in terms of the 12-hour clock, altitude, distance, type and direction of travel, or request radar vectors to avoid traffic conflicts.

In addition, all personnel should:

- Encourage personnel to identify and report existing and emerging safety issues through voluntary reporting programs.
- Apply SMS principles to analyze safety data and assess risk associated with emerging hazards. Evaluate existing risk mitigations to determine if they are effectively controlling risk, or if additional action is required.
- Review the following previously published InFOs, SAFOs and Advisory Circulars (AC):
  - InFO 24005, Instrument Approach Operations with a Visual Guidance Fix (VGF) and an Extended Visual Segment;
  - SAFO 23002, Aviation Safety Call to Action;
  - SAFO 21005, Risks Associated with Visual Approaches;
  - SAFO 17010, Incorrect Airport Surface Approaches and Landings;
  - SAFO 17012, High Collision Risk During Runway Crossing;
  - SAFO 17001, Pilot and Flightcrew Awareness of Class B Airspace Boundaries;
  - SAFO 16008, Reducing the Risk of Runway Excursions During Takeoff;
  - SAFO 13007, Using Runways as Taxiways;
  - SAFO 11004, Runway Incursion Prevention Actions;
  - SAFO 08001, Flightcrew techniques and procedures to enhance taxi, pre-takeoff, and after landing safety to reduce the risk of runway incursions;

- AC 90-48E, Pilots' Role in Collision Avoidance.

Contact: Direct questions or comments regarding this SAFO to the Air Transportation Division at 9-AFS-200-Correspondence@faa.gov.