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InFO

Information for Operators

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An InFO contains valuable information for operators that should help them meet certain administrative, regulatory, or operational requirements with relatively low urgency or impact on safety.

Subject: Pilot's Roles and Responsibilities During Visual Approaches

Purpose: This InFO encourages operators and pilots to review and become familiar with the "pilot's responsibilities" sections of the AIM in regards to the conduct of Visual Approaches.

Background: Recently, there have been several instances of pilots accepting and flying *Visual Approaches* in marginal Visual Meteorological Conditions (VMC), raising questions as to their compliance with regulations. According to the Aeronautical Information Manual (AIM), a *Visual Approach* authorizes a pilot flying under Instrument Flight Rules (IFR) to proceed visually to the airport while remaining "clear of clouds." Clearance for the approach is predicated upon the pilot having either the airport or the preceding identified aircraft in sight and the airport reporting a ceiling at or above 1,000 feet and a visibility of 3 miles or greater. (AIM 5-4-22a) A subset of the *Visual Approach* is the *Charted Visual Flight Procedure (CVFP)*, such as the depicted River Visual Rwy 19 at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA) (Fig. 1). *CVFPs* differ from normal *Visual Approaches* in that they require a pilot to have a charted landmark, rather than the airport, in sight (AIM 5-4-22/23). A *CVFP* may also have higher minimum weather requirements than a *Visual Approach*, which the pilot must comply with in conducting the *CVFP*; it should be noted that Air Traffic Control (ATC) will not issue clearances for *CVFPs*, when the weather is less than the published minimum. These minimums are displayed on the *CVFP* plate (3500ft/3mi in the case of the River Visual Rwy 19). Despite the fact that both types of *Visual Approaches* are conducted in VMC, they are considered IFR procedures. As such, the pilot must comply with all applicable IFR rules when conducting them. If the pilot wishes to fly under VFR after receiving clearance for the *Visual Approach*, it is the pilot's responsibility to notify ATC and cancel the IFR flight plan (AIM 5-4-22g).

Discussion: The conduct of *Visual Approaches* during marginal VMC requires careful decision making by the pilot. Again according to the AIM, it is the controller's responsibility not to clear a pilot for the *Visual Approach* unless the reported weather is at or better than 1000ft/3mi (AIM 5-5-11b). In accepting a visual approach, it is the pilot's responsibility to have either the airport or the preceding aircraft in sight and to remain "clear of clouds" at all times (AIM 5-5-11a). Considering that even a thin "scattered" or "isolated" layer could prevent a pilot from remaining "clear of clouds," it becomes apparent that a pilot may well be given a *Visual Approach*, that he is incapable of accepting or completing. The AIM is clear on this point. The pilot must "advise [Air Traffic Control] (ATC) immediately if the pilot is unable to continue following the preceding aircraft, cannot remain clear of clouds, needs to climb, or loses sight of the airport." (AIM 5-5-11a) In any of these cases, a go-around would be necessary. The requirement to remain "clear of clouds" extends to this go-around, since *Visual Approaches* lack missed approach segments.

Recommended Action: Directors of Operations, Directors of Safety, and pilots should review the guidance provided in the AIM regarding *Visual Approaches*. Pilots should be aware of the responsibilities of accepting and flying *Visual Approaches*, particularly during marginal VMC and notify ATC immediately if:

- Unable to continue following the preceding aircraft
- Unable to remain clear of clouds
- Unable to retain sight of the airport
- A climb is required.

Contact: Questions or comments regarding this InFO should be directed to Kurt Swanick, 121 Air Carrier Operations Branch, AFS-220 at (202) 267-5754.

Figure 1.

