



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

# InFO

Information for Operators

InFO 14012  
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Flight Standards Service  
Washington, DC

[http://www.faa.gov/other\\_visit/aviation\\_industry/airline\\_operators/airline\\_safety/info](http://www.faa.gov/other_visit/aviation_industry/airline_operators/airline_safety/info)

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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:** Flight Plan Discrepancies and Amendment Filing Procedures

**Purpose:** This InFO serves to remind operators of the importance of following appropriate procedures when amending an Air Traffic Services (ATS) flight plan.

**Background:** The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Air Traffic Organization (ATO) along with the Flight Standards Service (AFS) has noticed an increasing trend with discrepancies between the “filed” ATS flight plan and the “operational” flight plan provided to the flightcrew. These discrepancies can lead to a loss of separation and an increase in workload for Air Traffic Control (ATC) and flightcrew(s).

Examples include:

- During July 2014—Hours after departing JFK, ATC noticed a B77W flying a route that differed from the flight plan. While ATC had cleared the flight as filed based on the most recent flight plan, Dispatch had issued the pilot a route from an earlier filed flight plan.
- During August 2014—ATC provided a C525 1000’ vertical separation in Reduced Vertical Separation Minimum (RVSM) airspace based on the ATS flight plan. However, the operational flight plan indicated the flight was not RVSM approved.

Despite efforts to correct this problem, including monthly meetings between the FAA ATO and flight plan filers, flight plan discrepancy errors have continued.

**Discussion:** The majority of flight plan discrepancies appear to be caused by inadequate coordination of changes to flight plans. The most common types of problems seen include:

1. Sending of a “replacement” flight plan without canceling the original flight plan.
2. Sending a “replacement” flight plan after an attempt to cancel the original flight plan was unsuccessful (usually because the attempt to cancel occurred after the departure strip printed).

Either of the above cases results in multiple flight plans in the system. ATC will resolve these when aware of them, but there are cases (especially if the change is made very late) where ATC will not see the second flight strip in time. In a busy tower with parallel runways, the strips may even be distributed to different positions.

For example:

Flight 123 departure out of New York to London is planned on North Atlantic (NAT) Track W. The aircraft is planned for a flight level that requires Controller Pilot Data Link Communications (CPDLC)

and Automated Dependent Surveillance-Contract (ADS-C) equipment. During the preflight check the crew notices that the data link is not functioning normally. Maintenance is called and the system is deferred in accordance with the approved Minimum Equipment List (MEL). 20 minutes prior to departure, the aircraft dispatcher, or flight planner, realizes that a reroute will be required; refiles the flight plan via NAT Track Z, changes the required fuel, and notifies the flightcrew. (There are now 2 flight plans in the system for this flight). The flightcrew loads the second flight plan into the Flight Management System (FMS). However, the dispatcher fails to contact the overlying Air Route Traffic Control Center (ARTCC) Flight Data to inform them of the change. The crew is cleared as filed, based on the original flight plan, only to find out when they get their oceanic clearance that ATC was expecting them to fly NAT Track W. The crew then informs ATC that they cannot accept this route claiming they were filed appropriately on NAT Track Z.

**Note:** Flight plan changes are the leading cause of FMS input errors resulting in navigation errors. Such errors can be eliminated by enforcing the appropriate filing procedures.

Acceptable operator procedures may vary depending on whether they normally amend flight plans or cancel/refile, but in any case the following constraints must be addressed, since FAA systems do not allow any operator changes once the first departure strip prints, normally 45 minutes before the proposed departure time:

**Early Flight Plan Amendments:** If a flight plan is amended more than 45 minutes prior to the filed, proposed departure time, the aircraft dispatcher or flight planner can send a “Change” message. If the change involves a route change, the filer has the option to send a “Cancellation” message first, wait for an acknowledgement from the system, and then refile the flight plan accordingly. If there is any uncertainty whether the cancellation has been processed or if you cannot send a Cancellation message, then call Flight Data at the ARTCC and ask them to remove the flight plan. If the response to a cancel or change message is “REJECT- MANUAL COORDINATION REQUIRED” this means the system has locked the flight plan from user amendments and you must call the center.

**Late Flight Plan Amendments:** If any change occurs within 45 minutes of the proposed departure time, the recommended procedure is to request the controlling facility remove the current flight plan and inform them that the dispatcher or flight planner will be filing a new flight plan. When informed that the flight plan has been removed, the dispatcher should send the revised flight plan to the center. Dispatch can coordinate directly with the controlling facility when the pilot is known to be not yet in contact with ATC. The pilot and ATC must be part of the change coordination once they are in communication. Regardless of when and how the change is made, dispatch must take steps to ensure that any change communicated to the pilot is successfully coordinated with the controlling facility.

**Recommended Action:** Title 14 of the Code of Federal Regulations (14 CFR), parts 121, 125, 129, 91, 91 subpart K (91K) and 135 Directors of Operations, Directors of Airline Operations Control, Fractional Ownership Program Managers, and flight planning vendors; or pilots (91) should familiarize themselves with the information contained in this InFO and ensure procedures are established for flight plan amendments to eliminate the chance of having conflicting, or multiple operational and ATS flight plans. Flight planning information is available at the FAA Flight Planning website:

[http://www.faa.gov/about/office\\_org/headquarters\\_offices/ato/service\\_units/air\\_traffic\\_services/flight\\_plan\\_filing/](http://www.faa.gov/about/office_org/headquarters_offices/ato/service_units/air_traffic_services/flight_plan_filing/)

**Contact:** Questions or comments concerning this InFO can be directed to the Air Transportation Division, New Program Implementation Branch, AFS-240 at (202)-267-8166.