



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

# SAFO

Safety Alert for Operators

SAFO 12005  
DATE: 9/20/12

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)**

*A SAFO contains important safety information and may include recommended action. SAFO content should be especially valuable to air carriers in meeting their statutory duty to provide service with the highest possible degree of safety in the public interest. Besides the specific action recommended in a SAFO, an alternative action may be as effective in addressing the safety issue named in the SAFO.*

**Subject:** Aircraft Approach Category as defined under Title 14, Code of Federal Regulations, Chapter I, Subchapter F, Part 97, Subpart A., § 97.3

**Purpose:** This SAFO serves to ensure aircraft operators are aware that the aircraft approach category used during an instrument approach is determined by the aircraft's  $V_{ref}$  **at the maximum certificated landing weight or  $1.3 V_{so}$  at the maximum certificated landing weight.**

**Background:** Aircraft approach category means a grouping of aircraft based on a  $V_{ref}$  (*reference landing speed*), if specified, or if  $V_{ref}$  is not specified,  $1.3 V_{so}$  (*stalling speed or minimum steady flight speed in the landing configuration*), both at the maximum certificated landing weight.  $V_{ref}$ ,  $V_{so}$ , and the maximum certificated landing weight are those values as established by the certification authority. In 2002, § 97.3 was changed to include  $V_{ref}$  as well as  $1.3 V_{so}$  to establish approach category. The current regulation and this clarification are harmonized with ICAO PANS-OPS 8168.

**Discussion:** An aircraft's approach category does not change if the actual landing weight is less than the maximum certificated landing weight. The certificated approach category is permanent and independent of the changing conditions of day-to-day operations. An aircraft is certificated in only one approach category and cannot be flown to the minimums of a slower approach category, e.g., a category C aircraft cannot utilize category B minimums. Pilots are responsible for determining if a higher approach category applies. If the requirement for a faster approach speed places the aircraft in a higher speed approach category, the minimums for the appropriate higher category must be used, e.g., emergency returns requiring overweight landing, approaches made with inoperative flaps or in icing conditions, e.g., category C aircraft may be required to apply category D minimums.

**Recommended Action:** Directors of Operations, Directors of Training, Training Center Managers, Check Pilots, Training Pilots, flightcrews and the pilot in command (PIC) must ensure that an approach speed category that is less than the aircraft's approach speed category as determined by the aircraft's maximum certificated landing weight is not used.

**Contact:** Questions or comments regarding this SAFO should be directed to John Blair, Flight Operations Branch, AFS-410 at 202-385-4586 or Steve Moates, Air Carrier Operations Branch, AFS-220, 202-267-8166.