AIM 4-1-9. Traffic Advisory Practices at Airports Without Operating Control Towers

(view online)

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AIM 4-1-9. Traffic Advisory Practices at Airports Without Operating Control Towers

Summary

This document outlines recommended traffic advisory practices and communication procedures for pilots operating at airports without an operating control tower, emphasizing safety and situational awareness.

General Principles

- Pilots must remain alert when near uncontrolled airports, actively look for traffic, and exchange traffic information, especially since some aircraft may lack communication capability.
- All radio-equipped aircraft should transmit and receive on a common frequency designated for airport advisories, known as the CTAF.
- Communication options include contacting an FSS, a UNICOM station, or making self-announce broadcasts, with many airports providing automated weather and advisory info via UNICOM systems.

Communication Procedures

- The key to safe operations is selecting the correct CTAF frequency, which may be a UNICOM, MULTICOM, FSS, or tower frequency, as published.
- At airports with no tower or FSS, pilots should communicate with UNICOM or self-announce on MULTICOM (122.9) before taxiing, on final approach, and when leaving the runway.
- When an FSS is open, pilots should contact it for airport advisories, reporting their position, intentions, aircraft details, and requesting weather and traffic info.
- If the FSS or UNICOM is unavailable, pilots should obtain weather info from nearby controlled airports via ATIS or AWOS.
- Self-announce procedures involve broadcasting position and intentions on the designated CTAF, especially when no other communication station is present, with specific phraseology recommended for inbound, outbound, and practice approaches.
- For practice approaches, pilots should announce at key points (e.g., entering downwind, on final, or after missed approach) to alert other traffic.
- When operating in designated CTAF areas, especially in Alaska, pilots should announce when entering and leaving the area until clear.

Traffic Advisory Practices

- Inbound traffic should monitor and communicate on the CTAF from 10 miles out until landing; departing aircraft should do so from start-up through 10 miles out.

- Other operations like parachuting or practicing maneuvers should also monitor/communicate within 10 miles unless CFRs specify otherwise.
- Clear phraseology includes stating the airport name, position, altitude, and intentions, with examples provided for inbound, outbound, and approach scenarios.
- Pilots should be vigilant for aircraft that may not be in communication, especially during practice approaches or unusual operations.

Airport Advisory/Information Services

- When available, FSS provides Local Airport Advisory (LAA), Remote Airport Advisory (RAA), or Remote Airport Information Service (RAIS), offering weather, traffic, NOTAMs, taxi routes, and approach info.
- Communication with FSS involves initial contact about 10 miles out, reporting aircraft details, intentions, and requesting advisories.
- UNICOM stations, when designated as CTAF, may provide weather, wind, and traffic info upon request, with recommended phraseology to improve clarity and reduce congestion.
- If FSS or UNICOM info is unavailable, pilots can obtain weather from nearby controlled airports' ATIS or AWOS.

Summary

- Effective communication, situational awareness, and adherence to established procedures are vital for safety at uncontrolled airports. Pilots should use designated frequencies, announce intentions clearly, monitor traffic, and utilize available advisory services to mitigate risks associated with non-towered operations.

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Actual Language

a. Airport Operations Without Operating Control Tower

1. There is no substitute for alertness while in the vicinity of an airport. It is essential that pilots be alert and look for other traffic and exchange traffic information when approaching or departing an airport without an operating control tower. This is of particular importance since other aircraft may not have communication capability or, in some cases, pilots may not communicate their presence or intentions when operating into or out of such airports. To achieve the greatest degree of safety, it is essential that all radio-equipped aircraft transmit/receive on a common frequency identified for the purpose of airport advisories.

2. An airport may have a full or part-time tower or FSS located on the airport, a full or part-time UNICOM station or no aeronautical station at all. There are three ways for pilots to communicate their intention and obtain airport/traffic information when operating at an airport that does not have an operating tower: by communicating with an FSS, a UNICOM operator, or by making a self-announce broadcast.

3. Many airports are now providing completely automated weather, radio check capability and airport advisory information on an automated UNICOM system. These systems offer a variety of features, typically selectable by microphone clicks, on the UNICOM frequency. Availability of the automated UNICOM will be published in the Airport/Facility Directory and approach charts.

b. Communicating on a Common Frequency

1. The key to communicating at an airport without an operating control tower is selection of the correct common frequency. The acronym CTAF which stands for Common Traffic Advisory Frequency, is synonymous with this program. A CTAF is a frequency designated for the purpose of carrying out airport advisory practices while operating to or from an airport without an operating control tower. The CTAF may be a UNICOM, MULTICOM, FSS, or tower frequency and is identified in appropriate aeronautical publications.

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Summary of Recommended Communication Procedures

			Communication/Broadcast Procedures		
	Facility at Airport	**Frequency Use**	**Outbound**	**Inbound**	**Practice Instrument Approach**
1.	UNICOM (No Tower or FSS)	Communicate with UNICOM station on published CTAF frequency (122.7; 122.8; 122.725; 122.975; or 123.0). If unable to contact UNICOM station, use self-announce procedures on CTAF.	Before taxiing and before taxiing on the runway for departure.	10 miles out. Entering downwind, base, and final. Leaving the runway.	
2.	No Tower, FSS, or UNICOM	Self-announce on MULTICOM frequency 122.9.	Before taxiing and before taxiing on the runway for departure.	10 miles out. Entering downwind, base, and final. Leaving the runway.	Departing final approach fix (name) or on final approach segment inbound.
3.	No Tower in operation, FSS open	Communicate with FSS on CTAF frequency.	Before taxiing and before taxiing on the runway for departure.	10 miles out. Entering downwind, base, and final. Leaving the runway.	Approach completed/terminated.
4.	FSS Closed (No Tower)	Self-announce on CTAF.	Before taxiing and before taxiing on the runway for departure.	10 miles out. Entering downwind, base, and final. Leaving the runway.	
5.	Tower or FSS not in operation	Self-announce on CTAF.	Before taxiing and before taxiing on the runway for departure.	10 miles out. Entering downwind, base, and final. Leaving the runway.	

6.	Designated CTAF Area (Alaska Only)	Self-announce on CTAF designated on chart or Alaska Supplement (A/FD).	Before taxiing and before taxiing on the runway for departure until leaving designated area.	When entering designated CTAF area.	

2. CTAF (Alaska Only). In Alaska, a CTAF may also be designated for the purpose of carrying out advisory practices while operating in designated areas with a high volume of VFR traffic.

3. The CTAF frequency for a particular airport or area is contained in the A/FD, Alaska Supplement, Alaska Terminal Publication, Instrument Approach Procedure Charts, and Instrument Departure Procedure (DP) Charts. Also, the CTAF frequency can be obtained by contacting any FSS. Use of the appropriate CTAF, combined with a visual alertness and application of the following recommended good operating practices, will enhance safety of flight into and out of all uncontrolled airports.

c. Recommended Traffic Advisory Practices

1. Pilots of inbound traffic should monitor and communicate as appropriate on the designated CTAF from 10 miles to landing. Pilots of departing aircraft should monitor/communicate on the appropriate frequency from start-up, during taxi, and until 10 miles from the airport unless the CFRs or local procedures require otherwise.

2. Pilots of aircraft conducting other than arriving or departing operations at altitudes normally used by arriving and departing aircraft should monitor/communicate on the appropriate frequency while within 10 miles of the airport unless required to do otherwise by the CFRs or local procedures. Such operations include parachute jumping/dropping, en route, practicing maneuvers, etc.

3. In Alaska, pilots of aircraft conducting other than arriving or departing operations in designated CTAF areas should monitor/communicate on the appropriate frequency while within the designated area, unless required to do otherwise by CFRs or local procedures. Such operations

include parachute jumping/dropping, en route, practicing maneuvers, etc.

REFERENCE-
AIM, Parachute Jump Aircraft Operations, Paragraph 3-5-4.

d. Airport Advisory/Information Services Provided by a FSS

1. There are three advisory type services provided at selected airports.

(a) Local Airport Advisory (LAA) is provided at airports that have a FSS physically located on the airport, which does not have a control tower or where the tower is operated on a part-time basis. The CTAF for LAA airports is disseminated in the appropriate aeronautical publications.

(b) Remote Airport Advisory (RAA) is provided at selected very busy GA airports, which do not have an operating control tower. The CTAF for RAA airports is disseminated in the appropriate aeronautical publications.

(c) Remote Airport Information Service (RAIS) is provided in support of special events at nontowered airports by request from the airport authority.

2. In communicating with a CTAF FSS, check the airport's automated weather and establish two-way communications before transmitting outbound/inbound intentions or information. An inbound aircraft should initiate contact approximately 10 miles from the airport, reporting aircraft identification and type, altitude, location relative to the airport, intentions (landing or over flight), possession of the automated weather, and request airport advisory or airport information service. A departing aircraft should initiate contact before taxiing, reporting aircraft identification and type, VFR or IFR, location on the airport, intentions, direction of take-off, possession of the automated weather, and request airport advisory or information service. Also, report intentions before taxiing onto the active runway for departure. If you must change frequencies for other service after initial report to FSS, return to FSS frequency for traffic update.

(a) Inbound

EXAMPLE-
Vero Beach radio, Centurion Six Niner Delta Delta is ten miles south, two thousand, landing Vero Beach. I have the automated weather, request airport advisory.

(b) Outbound

EXAMPLE-
Vero Beach radio, Centurion Six Niner Delta Delta, ready to taxi to runway 22, VFR, departing to the southwest. I have the automated weather, request airport advisory.

3. Airport advisory service includes wind direction and velocity, favored or designated runway, altimeter setting, known airborne and ground traffic, NOTAMs, airport taxi routes, airport traffic pattern information, and instrument approach procedures. These elements are varied so as to best serve the current traffic situation. Some airport managers have specified that under certain wind or other conditions designated runways be used. Pilots should advise the FSS of the runway they intend to use.

CAUTION-
All aircraft in the vicinity of an airport may not be in communication with the FSS.

e. Information Provided by Aeronautical Advisory Stations (UNICOM)

1. UNICOM is a nongovernment air/ground radio communication station which may provide airport information at public use airports where there is no tower or FSS.

2. On pilot request, UNICOM stations may provide pilots with weather information, wind direction, the recommended runway, or other necessary information. If the UNICOM frequency is designated as the CTAF, it will be identified in appropriate aeronautical publications.

f. Unavailability of Information from FSS or UNICOM

Should LAA by an FSS or Aeronautical Advisory Station UNICOM be unavailable, wind and weather information may be obtainable from nearby

controlled airports via Automatic Terminal Information Service (ATIS) or Automated Weather Observing System (AWOS) frequency.

g. Self-Announce Position and/or Intentions

1. General. Self-announce is a procedure whereby pilots broadcast their position or intended flight activity or ground operation on the designated CTAF. This procedure is used primarily at airports which do not have an FSS on the airport. The self-announce procedure should also be used if a pilot is unable to communicate with the FSS on the designated CTAF. Pilots stating, *"Traffic in the area, please advise"* is not a recognized Self-Announce Position and/or Intention phrase and should not be used under any condition.

2. If an airport has a tower and it is temporarily closed, or operated on a part-time basis and there is no FSS on the airport or the FSS is closed, use the CTAF to self-announce your position or intentions.

3. Where there is no tower, FSS, or UNICOM station on the airport, use MULTICOM frequency 122.9 for self-announce procedures. Such airports will be identified in appropriate aeronautical information publications.

4. Practice Approaches. Pilots conducting practice instrument approaches should be particularly alert for other aircraft that may be departing in the opposite direction. When conducting any practice approach, regardless of its direction relative to other airport operations, pilots should make announcements on the CTAF as follows:

(a) Departing the final approach fix, inbound (nonprecision approach) or departing the outer marker or fix used in lieu of the outer marker, inbound (precision approach);

(b) Established on the final approach segment or immediately upon being released by ATC;

(c) Upon completion or termination of the approach; and

(d) Upon executing the missed approach procedure.

5. Departing aircraft should always be alert for arrival aircraft coming from the opposite direction.

6. Recommended self-announce phraseologies: It should be noted that aircraft operating to or from another nearby airport may be making self-announce broadcasts on the same UNICOM or MULTICOM frequency. To help identify one airport from another, the airport name should be spoken at the beginning and end of each self-announce transmission.

(a) Inbound

EXAMPLE-
Strawn traffic, Apache Two Two Five Zulu, (position), (altitude), (descending) or entering downwind/base/final (as appropriate) runway one seven full stop, touch-and-go, Strawn.
Strawn traffic Apache Two Two Five Zulu clear of runway one seven Strawn.

(b) Outbound

EXAMPLE-
Strawn traffic, Queen Air Seven One Five Five Bravo (location on airport) taxiing to runway two six Strawn.
Strawn traffic, Queen Air Seven One Five Five Bravo departing runway two six. Departing the pattern to the (direction), climbing to (altitude) Strawn.

(c) Practice Instrument Approach

EXAMPLE-
Strawn traffic, Cessna Two One Four Three Quebec (position from airport) inbound descending through (altitude) practice (name of approach) approach runway three five Strawn.
Strawn traffic, Cessna Two One Four Three Quebec practice (type) approach completed or terminated runway three five Strawn.

h. UNICOM Communications Procedures

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1. In communicating with a UNICOM station, the following practices will help reduce frequency congestion, facilitate a better understanding of pilot intentions, help identify the location of aircraft in the traffic pattern, and enhance safety of flight:

(a) Select the correct UNICOM frequency.

(b) State the identification of the UNICOM station you are calling in each transmission.

(c) Speak slowly and distinctly.

(d) Report approximately 10 miles from the airport, reporting altitude, and state your aircraft type, aircraft identification, location relative to the airport, state whether landing or overflight, and request wind information and runway in use.

(e) Report on downwind, base, and final approach.

(f) Report leaving the runway.

2. Recommended UNICOM phraseologies:

(a) Inbound

PHRASEOLOGY-
FREDERICK UNICOM CESSNA EIGHT ZERO ONE TANGO FOXTROT 10 MILES SOUTHEAST DESCENDING THROUGH (altitude) LANDING FREDERICK, REQUEST WIND AND RUNWAY INFORMATION FREDERICK.
FREDERICK TRAFFIC CESSNA EIGHT ZERO ONE TANGO FOXTROT ENTERING DOWNWIND/BASE/ FINAL (as appropriate) FOR RUNWAY ONE NINER (full stop/touch-and-go) FREDERICK.
FREDERICK TRAFFIC CESSNA EIGHT ZERO ONE TANGO FOXTROT CLEAR OF RUNWAY ONE NINER FREDERICK.

(b) Outbound

PHRASEOLOGY-
FREDERICK UNICOM CESSNA EIGHT ZERO ONE TANGO

FOXTROT (location on airport) TAXIING TO RUNWAY ONE NINER, REQUEST WIND AND TRAFFIC INFORMATION FREDERICK.
FREDERICK TRAFFIC CESSNA EIGHT ZERO ONE TANGO FOXTROT DEPARTING RUNWAY ONE NINER. "REMAINING IN THE PATTERN" OR "DEPARTING THE PATTERN TO THE (direction) (as appropriate)" FREDERICK.

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2.	No Tower, FSS, or UNICOM	Self-announce on MULTICOM frequency 122.9.	Before taxiing and before taxiing on the runway for departure.	10 miles out. Entering downwind, base, and final. Leaving the runway.	Departing final approach fix (name) or on final approach segment inbound.
3.	No Tower in operation, FSS open	Communicate with FSS on CTAF frequency.	Before taxiing and before taxiing on the runway	10 miles out. Entering downwind, base, and final. Leaving the runway.	Approach completed/terminated.

			for departure.		
4.	FSS Closed (No Tower)	Self-announce on CTAF.	Before taxiing and before taxiing on the runway for departure.	10 miles out. Entering downwind, base, and final. Leaving the runway.	
5.	Tower or FSS not in operation	Self-announce on CTAF.	Before taxiing and before taxiing on the runway for departure.	10 miles out. Entering downwind, base, and final. Leaving the runway.	
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