



National Wildfire Coordinating Group

National Interagency Aviation Committee

NIAC-24-02

Date: 17 July 2024
To: IHOPS, IASS, IABS, NCSC
From: Mike Reid, NIAC Chair, National Interagency Aviation Committee
Subject: Standardized National Aircraft Flight Schedule Form & Policy Review and implementation

Purpose: NIAC is formally requesting the review and implementation of the “Modern Flight Schedule” and associated Interagency policy submitted by the Flight Schedule Modernization Working Group (FSMG) (see enclosures). The objective of the review is to generate a collective recommendation identifying a final draft of the Modern Flight Schedule, and standardization of Interagency policy. Submission of the recommendation by National Coordination System Committee (NCSC) to NIAC should be no later than 10/10/2024.

Issue/Action:

Reference enclosed briefing paper

Background:

Reference enclosed briefing paper

Tasking(s):

1. NCSC to coordinate a review of the FSMG submitted “Modern Flight Schedule” with Interagency Helicopter Operations Subcommittee (IHOpS), Interagency Aerial Supervision Subcommittee (IASS), Interagency Airtanker Base Subcommittee (IABS). Objectives of the review shall include:
 - Align and expand interagency policy (Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations and National Interagency Standards for Resource Mobilization) direction for flight following and flight schedules.
 - Finalize a national standard form and distribution process.
 - Develop a standardized training on form, process, and requirements to improve a user’s understanding.

2. IHOPS, IASS, IABS will provide representation/input to complete the following:
 - Participate in drafting the policy alignment language until a final product can be created and delivered to NCSC.
 - Participate in the standard form and distribution process until a final product is delivered to NCSC.
 - Participate in the development of a standardized training until a final product can be delivered to NCSC for distribution and implementation.

3. NCSC will deliver a briefing to NIAC summarizing all final products as they relate to the review of objectives given previous. Upon approval by NIAC the following actions can be taken:
- Deliver drafted Interagency flight following and flight schedule policy language through appropriate process for implementation into the National Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations and the National Interagency Standards for Resource Mobilization.
 - Inherit NWCG publication steward responsibilities of the new National Flight Schedule Form. Place form on NWCG website under appropriate publications section.
 - Deliver standardized training to NICC, GACC's and local dispatch centers for use in annual Dispatch Workshops.
 - Consider standardized training implementation during D-312 revision process.

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Enclosure #1:

BRIEFING PAPER

Topic: Addressing the need for a standardized National Aircraft Flight Schedule Form

Date: May 28, 2024

From: Flight Schedule Modernization Working Group – includes aircraft coordinators from every GACC and the NICC as well as National Aviation Operations personnel

Group POC: Jennifer Humphrey – AICC Aircraft Coordinator jhumphre@blm.gov

Issue: Local Dispatch Centers and Geographic Area Coordination Centers have seen an increase in the workload associated with flight schedules nationally. There is currently no national standard form. Interagency standards and agency specific policy are conflicting on when submission is required and how information contained within the form impacts agency flight following; therefore, both training and completion is inconsistent. This results in users (aviation crews, pilots, flight manager) not submitting or submitting incomplete/inaccurate flight schedules, impacting the dispatch coordination system. Adding to the confusion, the ‘flight strip’ has multiple names and is referred to as either an agency flight plan, an aircraft flight request, or a flight schedule. Furthermore, it is inaccurately referred to interchangeably with a pilot’s FAA flight plan.

Background: Flight following is the process through which an aircraft is actively monitored, at regular intervals, using approved methods from departure point to destination. This results in the knowledge of aircraft location and condition providing a reasonable degree of certainty such that, in the event of a mishap, search and rescue may be initiated. The flight schedule facilitates critical information sharing and flight following requests between aviation crews and dispatch offices.

Currently, the national coordination system is plagued with massive vacancies; however, the increased workload due to inadequate flight schedules and the lack of a standardized form has been an issue for many years. The National Interagency Standards for Resource Mobilization, Chapter 50 states “Agency flight plans are the responsibility of the pilot, to be distributed through the originating dispatch office and are documented on an Aircraft Flight Request/Schedule.” However, dispatch offices routinely receive pushback from aviation crews when asked for the completed form before the scheduled flight.

Recommendation: A working group of Aircraft Coordinators from all Geographic Areas and NICC developed a nationwide survey in January 2024 to solicit feedback from Dispatch personnel and aviation users. The survey collected 359 responses and supported the development of a modernized flight schedule as a national standard form with a clear process. To improve consistency, clarity and safety for our dispatch centers and resources, the working group proposes the following prioritized recommendations:

- Align and expand interagency policy (Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations and National Interagency Standards for Resource Mobilization) and agency policy (FSM 5700 and DOI National Aviation Plans) regarding definitions and

requirements for flight following and flight schedules.

- Important and foundational to informing the next two recommendations, we feel clarifying policy (both agency and interagency) is an imperative first step that will then inform finalizing a national standard form and distribution process. Without expanding policy language, the root issues surrounding flight schedules (unclear intent and requirements, inconsistent completion and education) will remain despite any form updates.
- Develop a national standard form and distribution process.
- Standardize training on form, process, and requirements to improve a user's understanding of the "why" which is key to buy-in.

We propose that the National Coordination System Committee seek support from the National Interagency Aviation Committee on this proposal.

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Enclosure #2:

Aircraft Flight Schedule										
TO BE COMPLETED BY FLIGHT MANAGER/PILOT PRIOR TO DEPARTURE / CLICK HERE FOR INSTRUCTIONS										
Aircraft and Pilot Information										
FAA# & Call Sign			Make/Model			Color				
Pilot(s)			Pilot(s) Phone #			Aircraft Vendor				
Flight Type		Flight Following Method			Passenger Information					
Point to Point	<input type="checkbox"/>	Flight Following with the FAA	<input type="checkbox"/>	Chief of Party (COP)			COP phone #			
Mission Flight	<input type="checkbox"/>	Agency Flight Following	<input type="checkbox"/>	# of Passengers - Pilot +	Only Pilot(s) On Board		Charge Code			
Fixed Wing	<input type="checkbox"/>									
Helicopter	<input type="checkbox"/>									
Passenger Manifest										
Passenger Name			DPT	DST	Passenger Name			DPT	DST	
Flight Itinerary										
Departure				ETE	Arrival		Drop Off			
Flight Date	# PAX	Airport	ETD		Airport	EIA	# PAX			
Mission Details/Notes										
National Flight Follow Frequency			Rx/Tx 168.650 Rx/Tx tone 110.9			Local Flight Follow Frequency				
Air Guard			Rx/Tx 168.625 Tx Tone 110.9							
NICC Resource Tracking 1-800-994-6312										

Enclosure #3:

Flight Schedule Instructions:

- **Purpose:**
 - Required by policy when.....(to be completed when national standard criteria are established)
 - Tool used between aviation crews and the dispatch system to share flight information critical for resource tracking and, if warranted, mishap response
- **Aircraft and Pilot Information**
 - Important for mishap response procedures if necessary
 - Pilot contact information – Please list all pilots. Information allows recipient the ability to clarify information if needed.
- **Flight Following Methods – CHOOSE ONE**
 - *Flight Following with the FAA*
 - The National Interagency Standards for Resource Mobilization states that “It is the pilot’s responsibility to confirm with dispatch which type of FAA flight plan will be used. Automated Flight Following (AFF) or Verbal flight following is not required enroute when an FAA flight plan has been filed.”
 - Selection of the Flight Following with the FAA option indicates the pilot and/or designated flight manager has obtained FAA flight following and, apart from initial call out and final close out with dispatch, will not be receiving agency flight following.
 - *Agency Flight Following*
 - Local dispatch centers, beginning with the aircraft’s originating dispatch office, will track the aircraft’s location and condition at regular intervals throughout the duration of the flight or until flight following is terminated by the designated flight manager or pilot.
 - Accomplished through Automated Flight Following (AFF) or radio check ins occurring at least every 15minutes and relaying call sign, lat/long, and heading.
- **Passenger Information**
 - Please identify the chief of party (COP) and their contact information. This can be the same as the pilot (if so, you can re-enter pilot information or put same as pilot) or may be the flight manager, HMGB, ATGS, etc. If the COP is not on board, please notate this in the Mission Details/Notes.
 - # of passengers refers to the number of passengers in addition to the pilot(s) on board. This information is important in the event mishap response must be initiated.
- **Flight Itinerary**
 - Please indicate all anticipated legs of the flight with airports and ETD/ETA specified. These locations and times are important for resource tracking, flight following, and mishap response if needed.
 - Per the National Interagency Standards to Resource Mobilization – “The Flight Manager will contact the sending unit dispatch when the flight plan has deviated more than 30 minutes from the original flight plan.”
- **NICC Resource Tracking Phone Number – Flight Following vs Resource Tracking**
 - The NICC does not have radios and thus lacks the capability to attempt to contact an aircraft if they turn red on AFF (initial steps in aviation mishap response). Therefore, NICC is incapable of flight following aircraft. NICC instead resource tracks aircraft

- *Flight Following:*
 - The process(s) through which an aircraft is actively monitored, at regular intervals, using approved agency flight following methods from departure point to destination. This results in the knowledge of aircraft location and condition providing a reasonable degree of certainty such that, in the event of a mishap, search and rescue may be initiated.
- *Resource Tracking:*
 - An approved method by which the intended movement of a resource is documented and coordinated prior to departure, at completion of each leg, and upon arrival at destination. This results in the reasonable confirmation of a resource's status and safety.

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