

FSS Procedures©

The FSS may have up to 12 radios operating from one switch panel. It is necessary for the pilot to know the differing dedicated frequencies and how to obtain them. The emergency 121.5 and FSS universal 122.2 frequencies do not usually appear on charts or other sources. You, the pilot, are expected to know that these are common to flight service stations. If a frequency for an FSS is followed by an R, it means that the FSS can only receive. 122.1 is the common receive only frequency in which you must receive a FSS response over a VOR frequency. If a frequency is followed by a T, it means that the FSS can only transmit on that frequency. Since some of the frequencies may be far beyond the line of sight requirement it is important to be careful in making your frequency selection.

Failure to mention the frequency you are listening on may require an additional callup. You always save time in communications by doing it right the first time. Your initial communication should include the words, ...listening on (Frequency). You can improve your FSS communications comfort level by making PIREPS when making local flights. The FSS can offer complete weather service, frequencies, airport information, navigational assistance and emergency assistance. Except for the callup, other communications can be conversational.

Do not try to stretch radio range. Use nearest available frequency. Know how to select the appropriate FSS frequency, how to use it correctly and when to use it. Some FSS operation are only part-time. The FAA is in the process of making most FSS operations via remote facilities. Reference the AIM Chapter 4-92, 5-81, 70-50/58

FSS Communications

Listen for frequency congestion and check frequency. The initial FSS contact is always the same. Since the operator may be on any one of a number of radios at a different frequency you must wait before trying again. The callup to an FSS uses the format, name of FSS radio, aircraft identification, listening on (frequency).

Example:

"Oakland Radio Cessna 1234X listening 122.5"

FSS: "Cessna 1234X Oakland Radio go ahead"

Situation #1

Opening a flight plan after initial contact from above:

"Cessna 34X VFR Concord to Reno via Blue Canyon open flight plan off at one-two" (twelve minutes after hour)

FSS: "34X your flight plan is opened Oakland altimeter 3002"

Situation #2

Position report

Example:

"Oakland Radio Cessna 1234X listening 122.5"

"Cessna calling say again numbers and request"

"Cessna 34X position report VFR Concord to Reno Sacramento at four-five estimate Blue Canyon zero-eight Reno"

"34X roger your position report Sacramento altimeter 2992"

The sequence of the position report requires: Your identification; the fact that you are making a position report on a VFR/IFR flight between two distant points; that you are at a present position; the time you expect to reach your next major checkpoint; and the name only of the next checkpoint.

Situation #3

Weather PIREP

Example:

"Oakland Radio Cessna 1234X listening 122.5"

FSS responds...

"Cessna 34X VFR CCR-RNO request current weather and PIREPS for Sierras with winds at 9 and 12"

FSS will give as much data as is available. You may feel it desirable to give a PIREP of your current location and weather/winds/turbulence etc. You will be requested to include aircraft type and flight route. Consider getting nearby airport weather by listening on an AWOS frequency.

A PIREP becomes an official weather report. You are expected and required to give a PIREP when encountering any unforecast weather or hazard. The major items of a PIREP are cloud bases and tops, layers, flight visibility, visibility restrictions, precipitation, wind, temperatures aloft, icing and turbulence. You can give a PIREP to any ATC facility. As soon as you call it a PIREP it is required that the information be forwarded to other aircraft.

Situation #4

To Amend a flight plan

Example:

"Oakland Radio Cessna 1234X listening 122.5"

FSS responds...

"Cessna 34X VFR CCR-RNO wish to extend my ETA by three-zero minutes due to unexpected head winds"

Note: If on any flight plan you are going to be over 30 minutes late, be sure to contact the nearest FSS and give an extension to be forwarded to your destination. Being overdue by more than 30 minutes initiates search procedures.

Situation #5

To close flight plan

"Oakland Radio Cessna 1234X listening 122.5"

FSS responds...

"Cessna 34X Close VFR flight CCR-RNO 15 west RNO have airport in sight"

FSS closes flight plan

Situation # 6

Remote Communications Outlet (RCO)

RCO is a two way remote radio facility which is connected to a distant FSS via a land line. The discrete frequency is on top of the blue box with the letters RCO inside. Location shown in small blue outline boxes on sectional near remote cities.

Flight Watch

Sitting very near the FSS radio specialists is the Flight Watch radio specialist. His duties extend from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. local times. This is a nationwide weather information service operating on 122.0. use 135.7 if unable to make contact. The first Flight Watch station was activated at Oakland about twenty years ago. Since this is the only frequency he may have up to eight remote locations. Oakland has one at Reno, Red Bluff, Oakland, Big Sur, Sacramento, Fresno, and Ferndale near Eureka. There are three HiWAS frequencies for the airlines. Any aircraft over 5000' should be able to contact flight watch.

The essential is that the pilot give the name of the nearest VOR. Response may not be immediate because the specialist may be 'working' another aircraft hundreds of miles away from your location. This is an excellent frequency to monitor when flying cross country but contact should be related to weather. You may be able to give another pilot valuable information about your route as well getting real time information for your destination.

Example:

"Oakland Flight Watch Cessna 1234X (NEAREST VOR) over"

Always include in initial call up your location related to the nearest VOR. This allows the operator to select the best remote transceiver for your location. This is a weather service and, except in emergencies, should be limited to weather. Requests and information such as PIREPs have a regular format but conversational exchanges are acceptable.

EFAWS: "Cessna 1234X Oakland Flight Watch go ahead."

34X: "Cessna 34X VFR CCR-RNO have hit stronger than forecast head winds near Blue Canyon. Estimate winds to be 340 at 18-kts at 9500. Light turbulence high cirrus 40 mile visibility. Do you have additional information also current surface winds at Reno?"