



# CHOCK TALK

Newsletter of the Blue Sky Flying Club, est. 1957

## Pandemic Flying News

During our Covid-19 pandemic there have been several instances of ATC facility shutdowns. A controller tests positive and the entire facility - TRACON, tower, or even center is shutdown for sanitation. The situation is known as "ATC Zero".



I took this screenshot from the "Flightradar24" app on March 25. That gaping hole in the country's ATC system is Indianapolis Center.

So, for a VFR pilot - how does this affect us? At first blush it may seem like no big deal. If you're flying along getting advisories from center...true. And at a Class D airport, the services provided are generally *not* radar-based so if the facility is shut

down, it simply reverts to a non-towered airport with a CTAF. But in Class B or C airspace, the services are based on radar. With a radar outage, VFR aircraft are *not* shut out of that airspace. In a recent memo, the FAA stated that they "*do not have the authority to indefinitely withhold clearance from VFR aircraft requesting entry into Class B, C, or D airspace*". In that case, ATC will use non-radar traffic separation procedures. But...you're saying "Wait a minute... I thought ATC was shutdown". Yes but... there's always a *communications* backup. If it's a tower that's down, TRACON can cover. If not TRACON, then center. If a center is down, it could be the opposite - TRACON or another center. But they may not have radar. Remember: it will be a dynamic and confusing situation for a while so don't expect much.

The other caveat (and somewhat obvious) is that all the usual rules/regs still apply: weather minimums, mandatory communications, and equipment requirements.

## Situational Awareness How's your SA?

One of the more common terms used in aviation is "situational awareness" (SA). The FAA handbooks devote pages to this concept, yet it can be hard to define specifically. In fact, I guess you could say it depends upon your situation!

One concise definition I've heard is SA is knowing where you are and where you'll be. It is the perpetual comparison of where you think you are compared to what is actually happening, either physically or mentally. For example, when taxiing at a busy airport are you actually on the taxiway you think you are? Or in flight, are you mentally where you should be, say, in truly understanding the last set of instructions ATC provided?

One of the ways to enhance your SA is to constantly anticipate. Being situationally aware means never becoming complacent in the airplane. There's always something to plan for, to consider, to act on. In short, endeavor to never



let the aircraft get to a point that your brain didn't arrive at 5 minutes before.

In the VFR world, it's knowing where you are geographically and where you'll be. So, if you are using pilotage and looking at your chart then looking out the window, you are navigating. You have good SA. If instead, you are looking out the window and then at the chart, you are lost. You are said to have lost SA.



Similarly, when using GPS, are you constantly aware of why the box is directing you to fly a certain track or bearing? Are you in sync mentally and physically with what the automation is telling you?

How about that checklist; is it completed? Do you have a clear picture of where you and the airplane will be in the immediate future? Are you configured properly?

For IFR flight, it's all that and more given that you no longer have visual cues if you're in instrument meteorological conditions. Maintaining SA becomes all the more critical. That constant comparison of where you are and where you'll be needs to be done even more frequently. One tip to keep good SA in this environment is to constantly ask yourself "ok, what are the next 2 things about to happen?" and be ready to act on them.

Here's how Tammie Jo Shults, Southwest Airlines captain, describes SA and IFR flying: "Instrument flying is like flying VFR with your eyes closed and somebody whispering in your ear. Everything happens a little bit late. You need to always know what's coming next."



Maintaining good situational awareness calls for a pilot to be mindful and attentive, even in the relatively quiet moments. There are ways to improve SA proficiency: by thorough preflight planning, practicing basic stick and rudder skills, understanding ahead of time the key systems



## VFR Chart Updates

Currently, VFR charts are updated every 168 days. In February 2021, the FAA is changing that cycle to 56 days. About 90% of pilots use electronic charts now so the change should be seamless. The good news is that this will reduce the number of Chart NOTAMS significantly.

**SA...** of your aircraft - especially GPS and autopilot, practicing communication skills with ATC, and so many more.

Once social distancing ends, why not contact your instructor and schedule a flight to work on some of these things? Enhancing these skills will enhance your SA and keep you ahead of the airplane!

Safe skies and tailwinds,

Paul D'Auria, Gold Seal CFI MEI

## Pandemic Overnight

**Restrictions:** Effective Monday, June 1st the overnight reservation restrictions are removed. Feel free to reserve the planes for longer trips.

## Engine Runups at N51

Request from airport owners. When departing RWY 22, please do NOT do your engine runup in front of the hangar. Runups can be done in the tie-down parking spot or in the taxi/tie-down area just southwest of the hangar and east of the parallel taxiway.

## Know Your History Quiz:

Since 1957 our club has had a total of 451 members - 430 male and 21 female. Currently there are 81 members - 52 active and 29 inactive; 80 male and 1 female.

## News you can use:

### Next Membership Meeting

June 1st, 6:30pm

Weather permitting...

Ice Cream Social at 6:30 [no BBQ], Meeting at 7:30

Outdoors at N51

(please wear a mask and plan social distancing)

### Cheap fuel

Central Jersey \$3.50

Sky Manor \$3.75

Solberg \$4.79 (Must use the Phillips card)

## Annual Review Expiration Extension

In alignment with the SFAR issued by the FAA, anyone who had an expired Blue Sky Annual review in March, April, May, or June 2020 can extend their expiration date to 30 JUN 2020. You can update this yourself in the Profile section in Schedule Master. May of us are rusty after several months of inactivity, so please exercise good judgement. If you would like to fly with a flight instructor, many are now beginning to fly again with students they know are actively practicing social distancing.

*A superior pilot uses his superior judgement to avoid situations which might require his superior skill.*