

AOPA

Plan to oust center meteorologists a bad idea

AOPA wants weather forecasters at ARTCCs

By Thomas A. Horne

The FAA is planning to consolidate and reduce the number of meteorologists in air route traffic control centers (ARTCCs). Currently, these meteorologists serve in the center weather service units (CWSUs) of each ARTCC, lending their expertise and local knowledge to controllers in high-workload periods when adverse weather prevails.

AOPA has sent a letter to FAA management detailing the association's concerns with this proposal.

"There still exists an intrinsic, safety-based value in having an onsite NWS meteorologist at the ARTCC facilities. In order to capitalize on these benefits and maximize their use in today's air traffic environment, it may be necessary to redefine the role of the meteorologists and the way they interact with the air traffic controllers," Randy Kenagy, AOPA acting vice president of regulatory affairs, said in a letter to Nancy Kalinowski, the FAA's vice president of systems operations services.

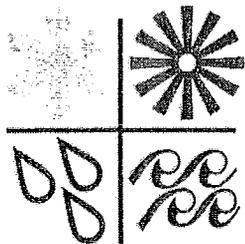
"According to the FAA's 10-year strategy for the Air Traffic Control Workforce 2008-2017, the FAA plans to hire nearly 17,000 new controllers. These controllers will not have the same knowledge or historical understanding of local area weather patterns to draw on, compared to the controllers they are replacing," Kenagy continued.

AOPA will be following this issue closely and will continue to engage the FAA to ensure the situation is resolved favorably.

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JUNE 2009

The Four Winds

National Weather Service Employees Organization

National Weather Service Proposes Risky Plan to FAA to Close Weather Offices at Air Traffic Control Centers – NWSEO Says Air Traffic Safety at Risk

National Weather Service Deputy Director Vickie Nadolski announced today that NWS is moving forward with its controversial plan to close the nation's CWSUs. If adopted this plan would end the real time, face-to-face, weather guidance to the air traffic controllers and air traffic management supervisors at each ARTCC, the same face to face service the NWS is trying to emulate with its plans for expanded decision support services. The NWS proposal would have forecasts from two central units located in Maryland and Kansas City.

NWSEO has vehemently opposed the consolidations of CWSUs and has actively voiced concerns to public officials, media outlets and its members regarding the safety implications for air travelers.

A copy of the press release sent to the media by NWSEO follows:

Commerce Secretary Approves Plan to Close Weather Offices at Air Traffic Control Centers: Move Will Endanger Traffic Safety, Forecasters Union Says

WASHINGTON D.C. (June 4, 2009) – The Department of Commerce announced today that it is moving forward with controversial plans to close the National Weather Service Center Weather Service Units (“CWSUs”) located at each of the 20 Air Route Traffic Control Centers (ARTCC) in the continental United States. These forecast units provide real time, face-to-face, weather guidance to the air traffic controllers and air traffic management supervisors. The NWS has offered to send the FAA forecasts from two central units located in Maryland and Kansas City instead. The proposal was developed by the NWS in response to an FAA request to cut the cost of the CWSU program, which is funded from the FAA budget.

“If DOC’s plan is implemented, air traffic controllers will no longer have the immediate expertise of an on-site meteorologist to advise them where to route aircraft experiencing difficulty when weather conditions play a critical role in that decision,” said Dan Sobien, President of the National Weather Service Employees Organization. NWS forecasters at the ARTCCs routinely provide emergency assistance to aircraft that have lost instrumentation during bad weather, Sobien noted.



Under the plan approved by Commerce Secretary Gary Locke, who oversees the NWS, only the “lead forecaster on duty” will be available at each of the two consolidated CWSUs nationwide as a point-of-contact to support to ten ARTCCs at a time. He or she will provide emergency support by instant messaging or telephone rather than face-to-face, and may be unavailable due to competing demands from other ARTCCs. Currently, each ARTCC has a dedicated forecaster on duty on-site.

New York Senior Senator Charles Schumer is outspoken about how the consolidation would affect flight safety at New York’s airports. As posted on his web site, Senator Schumer said, “Our airspace and airports are the most complex and congested in the world and to move the local experts away is simply penny wise and pound foolish. The bottom line is the FAA’s consolidation plans could compromise air travel safety and reduce the efficiency of travel in New York City and we simply cannot allow that to happen.”

The Commerce Department’s consolidation plans ignore the findings of a January 27, 2006 study of the CWSUs conducted for the FAA by Booz-Allen. The report concluded that all seven ARTCCs that participated in the study desired to retain an on-site CWSU and face-to-face interaction with meteorologists rather than rely on remote briefings.

On April 18, 2007 Senate Commerce Committee Chairman Inouye wrote the FAA Administrator a letter opposing consolidation plans because the Committee “has grave concerns over the safety and wisdom of removing meteorologists from the ARTCCs.” Senator Inouye wrote that “the Committee believes that the FAA should focus its efforts on working with the NWS to enhance the services provided by its meteorologists in situ, rather than considering proposals to obtain meteorological support for the ARTCCS from off-site.”

More information about the FAA’s plans to consolidate CWSU can be found at www.nwseo.org.

Media contact:

National Weather Service Employees Organization

Dan Sobien, President NWSEO, 202-420-1043

Richard Hirn, General Counsel 202-274-1812 or 202-255-3141



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NATCA DENOUNCES COMMERCE SECY. DECISION TO ADVANCE PLAN TO CLOSE WEATHER SERVICE UNITS AT REGIONAL FAA CENTERS

06/04/2009

WASHINGTON – The nation’s air traffic controllers today are strongly denouncing Commerce Secretary Gary Locke’s decision to move forward with a controversial plan to close the National Weather Service Center Weather Service Units (CWSUs) located at each of the 21 FAA regional en route centers and consolidate the service into two facilities, in Maryland and Kansas City.

Said NATCA President Patrick Forrey: “This is a foolish plan that puts cost savings ahead of safety. Quite frankly, we cannot believe such a reckless idea has gotten this far. The public needs to know that if put into place, this plan would directly and negatively affect the margin of safety for the air traffic control system.”

Currently, National Weather Service meteorologists are stationed in weather forecast units inside each one of the FAA’s Air Route Traffic Control Centers (ARTCC) – called en route centers for short. This system was put in place in 1978 as a result of a recommendation made by the National Transportation Safety Board. The FAA’s inability to quickly disseminate information regarding hazardous weather to flight crews was found to be a major contributing factor in the 1977 crash of a Southern Airways DC-9 in New Hope, Ga.

If the Department of Commerce’s plan is implemented, air traffic controllers will no longer have the immediate expertise of an on-site meteorologist to advise them where to route aircraft experiencing difficulty when weather conditions play a critical role in that decision. Therefore, NATCA and the National Weather Service Employees Organization (NWSEO) are urging an end to this plan due to both organizations’ concern that the flying public will be at risk if controllers are suddenly unable to quickly send hazardous weather information to flight crews.

“As our NATCA facility representative at Fort Worth Center, Russ Miller, has said, this is the kind of ill-conceived cost-savings that turns out to be tragically expensive the day after a disaster,” Forrey said. “There is absolutely no good or sensible reason to end what has been a key part of our ability to call our system the world’s safest. None whatsoever.”

NATCA representatives at en route centers nationwide have been outspoken in their opposition to the plan over the last several months. To view their press releases, please see the list below:

- [Saturday, June 27, 2009: SHOESTRING SMOKE: MAJOR WASHINGTON RADAR FACILITY CLOSURE OF BUREAU OF RALEIGH TRAFFIC AFFECTED](#)
- [Friday, June 19, 2009: FAA CREATES STAFFING PROBLEMS UNWISE SPLIT TOWER/RADAR](#)
- [Friday, June 12, 2009: UTAH CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION ADOPTS DELAY IMPLEMENTATION, CITING CONCERNS](#)

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- [Links](#)
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rather than considering proposals to obtain meteorological support for the ARTCCS from off-site.”

More information about the FAA’s plans to consolidate CWSU can be found at www.nwseo.org

- NWSEO-

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