Aeronautical Information Circular

SUBJECT: *__Call Sign Confusion__*

1.   Introduction

1.1   The use of similar call signs by aircraft operating in the same area on the same radiotelephony (RTF) frequency often gives rise to potential and actual flight safety incidents. This hazard is usually referred to as "call sign confusion".

1.2   The Call sign confusion is the major cause for aircraft taking a clearance not intended for them. The danger of an aircraft taking and acting on a clearance intended for another is obvious. Call sign confusion can lead to runway incursions, level busts, loss of separation and controlled flight into terrain (CFIT). There are many factors which contribute to call sign confusion, associated with:

> ➢ the way the message is transmitted
> ➢ the quality of the communication channel
> ➢ the perception and cognitive processing of the message, influenced between the other things by the frequency workload and flight phase complexity
> ➢ inadequate mitigation.

2.   Advice to Airline Operators

2.1   Avoid use of similar numerical call signs within own company;

2.2   Co-ordinate advance planning, whenever possible, with other Operators (ideally prior to commencement of summer and winter season) to reduce to a minimum any similar numeric and alphanumeric elements of call signs;

2.3   After implementation ensure there is a tactical response system to review and amend call signs where necessary;

2.4   Try to minimise use of call signs involving four digits and wherever possible use no more than three digits;

2.5   Avoid multiple use of the same digit e.g. ABC555;

2.6   If similar numbered call signs are inevitable, allow a significant time and/or geographical split between aircraft using similar call signs;

2.7   Avoid, whenever practicable, flight numbers ending in a zero or five e.g. 5 may be confused visually with S and zero, when combined with two digits, i.e. 150, may be confused with a heading/level;

2.8   Avoid use of similar/reversed digits/letters in alphanumeric call signs e.g. ABC 87MB and ABC 78BM;

3.   Advice to Flight Crew

3.1   If in doubt about an ATC instruction, do not use readback for confirmation.

3.2   Positively confirm instructions with ATC if any doubt exists between flight crew members.

3.3   Always use headsets especially during times of high RTF loading.

3.4   Do not clip transmissions.

3.5   Confirm unexpected instructions for any particular stage of flight.

3.6   Advise ATC if it is suspected that another aircraft has maintained an instruction. ATC may be unaware of this fact.

3.7   Exercise particular caution when members of the Flight Crew are involved in other tasks, and may not be monitoring the RTF.

3.8   At critical stages of flight actively monitor ATC instructions and compliance with them.

3.9   Use full RTF call sign at all times.

3.10   Use correct RTF procedures and discipline at all times.

4.   Advice to Controllers

4.1   Exercise particular caution when language difficulties may exist.

4.2   Advise adjacent sectors/airports if it is felt that potential confusion may exist between aircraft likely to enter their airspace.

4.3   The similarity of some aircraft call signs on the same frequency can cause confusion which may lead to an incident. Controllers are to warn pilots concerned and, if necessary, instruct one or both aircraft to use alternative call signs while they are on the frequency.

4.4   Do not Clip transmissions.

4.5   Do not use readback time to execute other tasks.

4.6   Ensure clearances are readback correctly.

4.7   Monitor flight crew compliance with RTF call sign use.

4.8   Use correct RTF discipline at all times.

5.   Reporting Action

5.1 Call sign confusions incidents that could affect the safety of aircraft by using Mandatory Occurrence Report (MOR) as details in AC/GEN/003, or through the operator's own safety reporting system.

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