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VHF RADIO TELEPHONY EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS

1 Need to Communicate at an Early Stage

1.1 Pilots are urged to request assistance from an Air Traffic Service (ATS) unit as soon as there is any doubt about the safe conduct of their flight. The ATS unit will then be better placed to offer guidance and information that will expedite the passage of the aircraft to an aerodrome where it may land safely.

1.2 No ATS unit will know that an aircraft is in difficulty unless this information is communicated in terms that make the situation immediately and clearly apparent.

1.3 The extent to which the ATS unit will be able to offer assistance will depend both on the amount of information that the pilots provide and on it being transmitted at the earliest moment following the realisation that a potentially hazardous situation has arisen, or is in the process of developing.

2 Procedures for use by Pilots

2.1 Pilots should give thought, as soon as possible after they recognise that a problem has occurred, to declaring to an ATS unit that a hazardous situation has arisen or could arise.

2.2 The correct method of communicating this information to ATC is by using the prefix 'MAYDAY, MAYDAY, MAYDAY' or 'PAN PAN, PAN PAN, PAN PAN' as appropriate. This procedure, which is an international standard, is the single most effective means of alerting the controller to the need to give priority attention to the message that will follow.

2.3 Reluctance by pilots to use the prefix 'MAYDAY' or 'PAN' in situations when either might be appropriate could introduce ambiguity and deny them information that could otherwise improve their situational awareness, thus helping them decide on the best course of action to follow. Air Traffic Controllers will have information available to them that might not be known on the flight deck and will offer this to the crew, but only when they have been told that an emergency exists.

2.4 If pilots do not use the prefix 'MAYDAY' or 'PAN' before transmitting details of technical or procedural difficulties, the controller may ask the pilot whether or not he/she 'wishes to declare an emergency', since the response he/she receives will, thereafter, directly affect the manner in which that aircraft is handled. However, pilots should not rely upon ATC to interpret messages without either prefix as being indications of distress or urgency but, rather, should use 'MAYDAY' or 'PAN' as the means most likely to produce immediate assistance.

2.5 If, subsequent to the transmission of 'MAYDAY, MAYDAY, MAYDAY' or 'PAN PAN, PAN PAN, PAN PAN', the nature of the emergency changes to the extent that the pilots consider the problem appears not to have been as serious as was first thought and they no longer wish to receive priority attention, they may, at their discretion, cancel the emergency condition using procedures specified in the Radiotelephony Manual (CAP 413).

2.6 The Authority would prefer that pilots believing themselves to be facing an emergency situation should declare it as early as possible and cancel it later if they decide that the situation allows.

3 Use of Air Traffic Services



→ 3.1 AIC 26/1997 (Pink 138) and corrigendum on AIC 36/1997 (Pink 142) contains full details of the VHF International Aeronautical Emergency Service and how, when flying in UK airspace, pilots should inform an ATS unit of the emergency (ie use of transponder codes, frequencies, prefixes). CAP 413 provides examples of distress messages from an aircraft and the response that can be expected from an ATS unit.

3.2 In addition to the services provided on the VHF International Emergency Service frequency of 121.500 MHz, pilots should be aware that all ATC units within the United Kingdom provide an alerting service for aircraft in emergency. **Controllers will offer as much assistance as possible to any aircraft considered to be in an emergency situation. Assistance can include the provision of information on the availability of aerodromes and their associated approach aids, directional guidance, weather information and details of terrain clearance.**

3.3 Where a controller considers that another ATS unit may be able to give more assistance and that in the circumstances it is reasonable to do so, pilots may be asked to change to another frequency. In this event, pilots should ensure that the appropriate prefix is included in the initial message to the new ATS unit whilst the emergency state continues to exist. If communication cannot be established on the new frequency, pilots should revert immediately to the transferring controller.



→ 3.4 The advice given above is not intended to replace any of the contents of either AIC 26/1997 (Pink 138) and corrigendum on AIC 36/1997 (Pink 142) or CAP 413, but is intended to emphasise **the necessity for pilots to make use of Air Traffic Services as soon as it becomes apparent that assistance may be needed.**

This Circular is issued for information, guidance and necessary action.