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SUBJECT: SAFETY IN MNPS/RVSM AIRSPACE OF THE ICAO NAT REGION

THIS AERONAUTICAL INFORMATION CIRCULAR IS PUBLISHED IN IDENTICAL TERMS BY STATES HAVING RESPONSIBILITIES ON THE NORTH ATLANTIC.

The ICAO North Atlantic Systems Planning Group (NAT SPG), at its forty-third meeting in Paris from 12-15 June 2007, noted a list of safety-related issues affecting the operations in the NAT Region.

The Member States want to alert airspace users on the following issues.

1 STRATEGIC LATERAL OFFSET PROCEDURE (SLOP)

SLOP was created to reduce the risk of collision.

SLOP involves the selection of offsets to the right of the cleared track as a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP).

Random distribution of aircraft on and to the right of the centre line is key to compensating for the extremely accurate navigation capabilities of modern aircraft.

This accuracy creates a situation where aircraft can be at immediate risk of collision if there is an unintended loss of vertical separation between flights following the same or reciprocal tracks.

By allowing pilots to randomly select to fly either one or two nautical miles (NM) right of the centre line, SLOP also incorporates wake turbulence avoidance.

Although some NAT operators have successfully implemented this procedure as a SOP, there is still relatively little uptake on the part of the majority of NAT operators.

In practical terms:

1. if your aircraft can be programmed to fly an offset, fly a one NM or a two NM offset to the right of the centre line ;
2. being random is key to the procedure - follow your company's SLOP SOPs or find ways to choose different offsets for each flight ;
3. always fly your offset to the right of the centre line
4. you should fly an offset from oceanic entry to oceanic exit ;
5. you don't need an ATC clearance for an offset ;
6. you don't need to report that you are flying an offset if you are in the NAT Region ;
7. if your offset causes wake turbulence problems, choose a different SLOP option (zero, one, or two NM to the right of the centre line).

Further information regarding the use of SLOP in the NAT Region is available on the NAT Programme Coordination Office (NAT PCO) Website at www.nat-pco.org.

2 REPORT LEAVING, REPORT REACHING

The early discovery of altitude deviations is extremely important to the overall safety of NAT operations.

Recently, it has been discovered that pilots frequently defer the required reports of leaving and reaching flight levels until the next routine communication.

This has led to instances where aircraft have flown at the incorrect flight level for long durations.

This is not acceptable from a system safety standpoint.

While the actual number of vertical errors in the NAT Region is relatively small, the fact that some of these errors continue undetected (and therefore uncorrected) for long durations, has resulted in an unacceptable situation.

In practical terms:

1. report leaving a flight level as soon as you begin your climb or descent ;
2. similarly, report reaching a flight level as soon as you are level ;
3. in RVSM airspace, provide the reports even if ATC has not specifically requested them.

3 ADHERENCE TO OCEANIC CLEARANCE

As a key part of ensuring the overall safety in the NAT Region, pilots are reminded of the importance of strict adherence to the oceanic clearance.

The NAT oceanic clearance provides separation from all known aircraft from oceanic entry to oceanic exit.

This separation can only be assured if all aircraft enter oceanic airspace in accordance with their oceanic clearance.

Although it may be desirable to defer climb or descent to the cleared oceanic flight level, delaying the request may result in entering oceanic airspace at an incorrect flight level.

This has an extremely negative impact on the overall safety situation.

In practical terms:

1. flights must enter oceanic airspace level at the cleared oceanic flight level ;
2. flights must enter oceanic airspace at the cleared oceanic entry point ;
3. flights must maintain the assigned true Mach number ;
4. if a pilot cannot comply with any part of the oceanic clearance, ATC must be informed immediately ;
5. pilots must ensure that their aircraft performance enables them to maintain the cleared oceanic flight level for the entire oceanic crossing ;
6. if a pilot discovers that the aircraft is not able to reach or remain at a cleared flight level, ATC must be informed immediately.

Further information regarding recommended practices in the NAT Region can be found in the NAT MNPS Airspace Operations Manual and the "On the Right Track" presentations, available on the ICAO NAT Programme Coordination Office (NAT PCO) Website at www.nat-pco.org.