

In summary, be careful not to rely on GPS to solve all VFR navigational problems. Unless an IFR receiver is installed in accordance with IFR requirements, no standard of accuracy or integrity has been assured. While the practicality of GPS is compelling, the fact remains that only the pilot can navigate the aircraft, and GPS is just one of the pilot's tools to do the job.

VFR Waypoints

VFR waypoints provide VFR pilots with a supplementary tool to assist with position awareness while navigating visually in aircraft equipped with area navigation receivers. VFR waypoints should be used as a tool to supplement current navigation procedures. The uses of VFR waypoints include providing navigational aids for pilots unfamiliar with an area, waypoint definition of existing reporting points, enhanced navigation in and around Class B and Class C airspace, and enhanced navigation around Special Use Airspace. VFR pilots should rely on appropriate and current aeronautical charts published specifically for visual navigation. If operating in a terminal area, pilots should take advantage of the Terminal Area Chart available for that area, if published. The use of VFR waypoints does not relieve the pilot of any responsibility to comply with the operational requirements of 14 CFR part 91.

VFR waypoint names (for computer entry and flight plans) consist of five letters beginning with the letters "VP" and are retrievable from navigation databases. The VFR waypoint names are not intended to be pronounceable, and they are not for use in ATC communications. On VFR charts, a stand-alone VFR waypoint is portrayed using the same four-point star symbol used for IFR waypoints. VFR waypoint collocated with a visual checkpoint on the chart is identified by a small magenta flag symbol. A VFR waypoint collocated with a visual checkpoint is pronounceable based on the name of the visual checkpoint and may be used for ATC communications. Each VFR waypoint name appears in parentheses adjacent to the geographic location on the chart. Latitude/longitude data for all established VFR waypoints may be found in the appropriate regional A/FD.

When filing VFR flight plans, use the five-letter identifier as a waypoint in the route of flight section if there is an intended course change at that point or if used to describe the planned route of flight. This VFR filing would be similar to VOR use in a route of flight. Pilots must use the VFR waypoints only when operating under VFR conditions.

Any VFR waypoints intended for use during a flight should be loaded into the receiver while on the ground and prior to departure. Once airborne, pilots should avoid programming routes or VFR waypoint chains into their receivers.

Pilots should be especially vigilant for other traffic while operating near VFR waypoints. The same effort to see and avoid other aircraft near VFR waypoints is necessary, as is the case when operating near VORs and NDBs. In fact, the increased accuracy of navigation through the use of GPS demands even greater vigilance, as off-course deviations among different pilots and receivers is less. When operating near a VFR waypoint, use whatever ATC services are available, even if outside a class of airspace where communications are required. Regardless of the class of airspace, monitor the available ATC frequency closely for information on other aircraft operating in the vicinity. It is also a good idea to turn on landing light(s) when operating near a VFR waypoint to make the aircraft more conspicuous to other pilots, especially when visibility is reduced.

Lost Procedures

Getting lost in an aircraft is a potentially dangerous situation especially when low on fuel. If a pilot becomes lost, there are some good common sense procedures to follow. If a town or city cannot be seen, the first thing to do is climb, being mindful of traffic and weather conditions. An increase in altitude increases radio and navigation reception range, and also increases radar coverage. If flying near a town or city, it might be possible to read the name of the town on a water tower.

If the aircraft has a navigational radio, such as a VOR or ADF receiver, it can be possible to determine position by plotting an azimuth from two or more navigational facilities. If GPS is installed, or a pilot has a portable aviation GPS on board, it can be used to determine the position and the location of the nearest airport.

Communicate with any available facility using frequencies shown on the sectional chart. If contact is made with a controller, radar vectors may be offered. Other facilities may offer direction finding (DF) assistance. To use this procedure, the controller requests the pilot to hold down the transmit button for a few seconds and then release it. The controller may ask the pilot to change directions a few times and repeat the transmit procedure. This gives the controller enough information to plot the aircraft position and then give vectors to a suitable landing site. If the situation becomes threatening, transmit the situation on the emergency frequency 121.5 MHz and set the transponder to 7700. Most facilities, and even airliners, monitor the emergency frequency.

Flight Diversion

There probably comes a time when a pilot is not able to make it to the planned destination. This can be the result of unpredicted weather conditions, a system malfunction, or