
Joint Industry Statement on the Misuse of International Aeronautical Emergency Frequency 121.5 MHz

BACKGROUND

Inappropriate use of 121.5 MHz, also referred to as a "guard frequency", remains a significant safety concern for the aviation community. This frequency is designated for emergency communications and distress signals, and its misuse can lead to serious consequences. When non-emergency communications occur on this channel, they can mask or interfere with genuine distress calls, potentially delaying critical responses to emergency situations.

To combat this issue, aviation safety agencies and organizations, including the US FAA and Eurocontrol, actively work to raise awareness about the proper use of 121.5 MHz. They engage in educational campaigns, issue regulations, and sometimes impose penalties for misuse to ensure that 121.5 MHz remains available for genuine emergencies.

ICAO PROVISIONS

ICAO Annex 10, Volume II, § 5.2.2.1.1.3 recommends that all flights "should guard the emergency frequency 121.5 MHz to the extent possible".

ICAO Annex 10, Volume V, § 4.1.3.1.1 states that frequency 121.5 MHz "shall be used only for genuine emergency purposes" broadly covering the following activities:

- Handling of emergency situations
- Air-ground communication with aircraft experiencing airborne equipment failure
- Search and rescue operations and the operation of emergency locator transmitters (ELTs) and air policing/interception action

NOTE

Some states have filed differences to ICAO SARPs related to the use of 121.5 MHz. For instance, in the UK it can also be used for practice PAN calls to ensure pilot familiarity with the process. Such differences are detailed in national AIPs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Inappropriate conversations on 121.5 MHz could interfere with its intended use and must be avoided.

Airline pilots should monitor 121.5 MHz and only transmit on the frequency for emergency purposes as specified by ICAO.

Aircraft operators are invited to remind flight crews regarding correct use of 121.5MHz according to ICAO/national requirements and company policy.

Air Navigation Service Providers and State Aviation Authorities are invited to contribute their perspective regarding protection of 121.5MHz for emergency use only.