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Subject: [Helene Update] Ensuring Safe Air Operations
Date: Saturday, October 5, 2024 8:16:44 AM
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Good morning NC Airports and Aviation partners-

We have received numerous questions in the last 24 hours from media sources as well as social media about actions that the FAA, FEMA, and other emergency management partners are taking to ensure safe air operations over western NC. I wanted to ensure you had the latest information about these efforts for your awareness and in case you receive questions. Please note that this information is can also be provided in simple language written for the general public. Let us know if you would like a copy of the plain language.

Status of air operations in western North Carolina

The extraordinary outpouring of support for North Carolina has been unprecedented and overwhelming. Across the state and the country, airports, pilots, line technicians, citizens and communities have been arriving at North Carolina's airports to deliver critical supplies including food, water, medicines, and baby formula.

Post-Helene, FAA states that air traffic over western North Carolina has increased 300%.

The NC National Guard, Army and search and rescue partners are surging into the region, bringing many aviation assets including heavy lift helicopters. In addition, private air drop and search and rescue groups are operating unprecedented levels with hundreds of operations in small aircraft and personal helicopters occurring across the region. With this volume of aircraft, comes a need for organization and measures to get relief and rescue to North Carolinians quickly and safely.

Areas of Concerns

There are two primary areas partners are monitoring and putting strategizes in place to manage:

- The first is **safety**; with the significant rise in air traffic from community-based organizations and the surge in military aviation aircraft, it is vital that we ensure all parties can operate safely within North Carolina's congested airspace. Post-Helene, there have been two small aircraft incidents involving airdrop operations that resulted in runway closures at general aviation airports. In addition, there

have been reports of several near misses between civilian and military aircraft

- The second is **resourcing for fuel and aircraft parking** on the ground. General Aviation airports have limited capacity for fuel. Post Helene, two general aviation airports ran out of aviation fuel required for air drop operations and Civil Air Patrol missions and caused a reduction in operations. Fuel levels have since been restored at both airports. Apron or aircraft parking space are also a concern as many aircraft are looking to fuel and unload supplies with limited apron or parking space to do so.

Safety Strategies

In order to deconflict aircraft and meter the flow of traffic to a safe and manageable level, partners including the FAA, FEMA, NC National Guard, and the Division of Aviation have developed several strategies:

- **Prior Permission Request lines** -Prior Permission Request lines are phone lines staffed by FEMA at airports that pilots call in advance of landing in order to request a landing time and parking space. Prior Permission Request lines allow airports to meter the flow of traffic into the airport to ensure parking and resources are available for the aircraft when they land. This strategy was first enacted at Asheville Regional Airport on Wednesday afternoon and Rutherford County Friday morning, and the FAA Air Traffic Control reports that operations are now at a sustainable level for Air Traffic Controllers to manage safely.
- **SAAFR Routes**- SAAFR routes is military strategy of establishing designated airspace corridors or roads in the sky to facilitate aircraft movement. For Helene, the SAAFR routes will provide designated corridors that separates military and civilian aircraft and provides communication standards between the two. This use of SAAFR routes to manage civilian and military aircraft is a first-of-it's kind solution that is working very well according the to civilian groups and military units engaged in the routes
- **Temporary Flight Restrictions** -Temporary Flight Restrictions are an FAA measure that limits aircraft movement over a designated area for a specific period of time. Currently, search and rescue partners are utilizing these for quick, time limited and tightly defined areas where multiple search and rescue aircraft are operating
- **Temporary Air Traffic Control Towers** – Temporary ATC Towers provide additional airspace management into and out of an airport for the duration of an event, in this case, Helene response. Partners are looking to deploy these at select congested General Aviation airports over the next several days.
- In addition, Division staff are continuously monitoring airports for fuel levels, staffing and safety conditions, particularly at General Aviation airports.

The goal of all our partners is to ensure the safe operations of the diverse groups of aircraft currently operating in western North Carolina. Helene has already devastated so many; we want every pilot, aircraft and airport staff member to go home safely every night of Helene response. Our military and civilian aviation partners are providing vital services to North Carolinians cut off from other access and we hope you will join us in supporting strategies like these that can allow partners to operate safely.

Thanks,
Becca

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