

## **FLYING ABROAD - FLIGHT PLANS (FP)**

You are required to submit a Flight Plan (FP) whenever you cross an International Flight Information Region (FIR) boundary. It is advisable to do so when you cross over water for more than 10nm or sparsely populated areas particularly if you are on your own. So going to France you need to file a FP, flying around Northern Scotland or to the Scilly Isles it is advisable but your choice.

Why? It is the system which allows you to transmit your planned flight details in a common format to all interested parties; primarily for your safety. Or put more simply, when you don't turn up the authorities know your route, timings, numbers etc as the start point to look for you. This of course implies that you need to be accurate in your submission and conform to it...

How to file a FP. Most pilots for convenience will be submitting via one of the flight planning software programmes, typically SkyDemon these greatly simplify the process. But it is advisable to gain an understanding of the form and how and why it is completed. Invaluable to this process is the CAA Safety Sense Leaflet 20c VFR Flight Plans, this can be found at: [publicapps.caa.co.uk/docs/33/20130121SSL20.pdf](http://publicapps.caa.co.uk/docs/33/20130121SSL20.pdf) Now when you are populating in SkyDemon you will know what to input for things like Mode S Transponder and Safety Equipment. It is a good idea to carry a copy of this guide in the aircraft. Don't forget all timings are UTC...

You can also submit a FP on line, via the NATS sponsored Assisted Flight Plan Exchange (AFPEX) you need to register yourself and file on line at: <https://ts1.flightplanningonline.co.uk/> This is not particularly user friendly, so prior practice and a good understanding of the filing process is essential. Submitting via Fax is still possible but it is not actively encouraged, but the option is currently available. Fax to: 01489 612793.

Finally, you can get the airfield to file a FP for you if they have Airfield Fixed Telecommunications Network (AFTN) communications. You just complete a hard copy of the form (use the guide to assist) and submit it to the Air Traffic Service Unit (ATSU). CA48 is the Flight Plan Form and can be found at: <http://www.myafpex.co.uk/documents/FPL%20Form.pdf>

For all these FP filing options you require a lead time of 60 minutes from submission to activation but can do it up to 120 hours in advance if you want. Just ensure you enter the correct date of flight in the FP (those guidance notes are again invaluable for this).

Having filed the FP you now need to activate it. If you filed it via an airfield ATSU then they will open it for you and inform you of the time activated once you are airborne. It's a good idea to remind the radio operator when you ask for taxi and departure, just slip in "with a Flight Plan to Le Touquet" or where ever into the transmission. If I have filed the FP say via SkyDemon then once in the air I open it myself with a brief call to London Information including the time airborne (in UTC). Alternatively you can call any airfield with an active ATSU and request they open it for you. Finally you can get a responsible person to telephone and activate the FP for you (again read those notes) once you are airborne. Ring: 0845 6010483 and 01489 612792 the key point to note in the whole activation process is the onus to activate resides with the pilot.

If you are delayed in departure from your stated time longer than 60 minutes or cancel the flight then you must amend your FP either by amending it within SkyDemon, or use the ATSU or AFTN.

Having enjoyed the flight you now need to close the FP. If you have returned to the UK and are landing at your planned destination then you do not have to! The UK is different to everyone else and it just lapses and your safe arrival is assumed, it is the responsible persons role to sound the alarm if you do not turn up. Now you can see the importance of briefing this person fully, just imagine you skip this briefing and the engine stops mid channel between Cherbourg and IOW, you may not have had good comms and will feel quite foolish bobbing around in the water with nobody going to sound the alarm... The responsible person must sound the alarm once you are 30 minutes overdue your stated ETA using the same 2 telephone numbers previously given.

When you land at an airfield outside of the UK you must close the FP yourself. If it has an ATSU give them the same nudge in your opening transmission “on a flight plan” and once landed confirm it is closed. You can telephone once you have landed, the French (English spoken) number is: 0033 156 301301 but in extremis I have called the UK numbers to close it. Of course you can also do it via SkyDemon as long as you have the network connection. You can also close it on the radio just prior to landing but having tried this many times in France I frequently failed to achieve this. Either way; note the responsibility to close the FP reside once again with the pilot, at 10,000 Euros an hour for a helicopter Search and Rescue this is worth getting right?

Want chapter and verse on Flight Plans then see CAP 694 at:

<http://publicapps.caa.co.uk/modalapplication.aspx?appid=11&mode=detail&id=2375>

For a practical example of a completed FP visit: [https://skybrary.aero/index.php/Flight\\_Plan\\_Filling](https://skybrary.aero/index.php/Flight_Plan_Filling)

The other area where confusion can arise for the first timer is in some of the radio terminology, “report coasting out” is hopefully self explanatory from all those war films! But “estimate to the FIR boundary” might give you a surprise. So I would recommend you fly with an experienced pilot the first time or at least talk it through in detail prior to the flight.

Nothing to do with the FP but it is a good idea to also carry the Distress and Diversion Cell number which is: 01489 612406. Plus ensure your responsible person and partner have it as well, one day in the future if misfortune falls you might be grateful for it.