

Did You Know?

By Charlie Bell, DPE and FAAS Team Representative

SPECIAL VFR CLEARANCE

1. A Special VFR Clearance must be obtained prior to operating within a Class B, C, D, or E surface area WHEN THE WEATHER IS LESS THAN THAT REQUIRED FOR VFR FLIGHT.

2. A VFR pilot may request and be given a clearance to enter, leave, or operate within most Class D and Class E surface areas and some Class B and Class C surface areas in special VFR conditions; TRAFFIC PERMITTING AND PROVIDING SUCH FLIGHT WILL NOT DELAY IFR OPERATIONS.

3. ALL SPECIAL VFR FLIGHTS MUST REMAIN CLEAR OF CLOUDS.

4. THE VISIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

FOR SPECIAL VFR AIRCRAFT ARE:

a. At least 1 statute mile flight visibility for operations in Class B, C, D, and E surface areas. At least 1 statute mile ground visibility if taking off or landing. (If flight visibility is not reported at that airport, the flight visibility must be at least 1 statute mile).

5. When a control tower is located within the Class B, C, and D surface areas, the request should be to the tower.

6. In a Class E surface area, the clearance can be through the nearest Tower, FSS or Center.

7. It is not necessary to file a complete flight plan with the request for clearance,

BUT pilots should state their intentions in sufficient detail to permit ATC to fit their flight into the Traffic Flow, i.e., where are you flying to.

8. The clearance will not state a specific altitude because the pilot must remain CLEAR OF CLOUDS.

9. The controller may require the pilot to fly at or below a certain altitude due to other traffic, BUT the altitude specified will permit flight at or above the MSA. (In addition, at RADAR LOCATIONS, flights may be vectored if necessary for control purposes OR ON PILOT REQUEST).

NOTE: THE PILOT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR OBSTACLE CLEARANCE OR TERRAIN CLEARANCE

10. Special VFR Clearances are effective

within Class B, C, D, and E surface areas only. (ATC does not provide separation AFTER an aircraft leaves the Class B, C, D, or E surface area on a Special VFR Clearance.)

11. Special VFR operations are prohibited in some Class B & C surface areas due to high IFR traffic. (Re: Part 91, Appendix D, Section 3.) Re: 91-157 SVFR Wx minimums and 91-131(b)(2) Class B SVFR restrictions.

12. The restrictions are depicted on Sectional Charts.

13. ATC provides separation between Special VFR Flights and between Special VFR Flight and IFR flights.

14. Special VFR operations are prohibited between SUNSET and

SUNRISE unless the pilot is IFR rated and the airplane is equipped for IFR flight.

15. Pilots arriving or departing an uncontrolled airport that has automated weather broadcast capability (ASOS/AWOS) should monitor the broadcast frequency, advise the controller that they have the "One Minute Weather" and state their intentions PRIOR TO OPERATING WITHIN THE CLASS B, C, D, or E SURFACE AREAS.

Special VFR Procedures

Special VFR Procedures (SVFR) are for Fixed Wing Aircraft only. This does not apply to helicopters.

What all this regulatory information means to pilots:

1. Before you request a Special VFR clearance, you must review the airspace structure around your departure airport. Does the chart identify SVFR qualified airspace around your airport, i.e., B, C, D or E airspace? The E airspace must be "Surface" airspace. Look at Jonesboro (JBR) or Hot Springs (HOT) as two examples.

2. You can file a Special VFR Clearance with a FSS, Tower or ATC facility.

3. Tell them where you are at and what you want to do.

4. Suppose you are at a Class D airport. Some questions to consider before you request a SVFR clearance are:

- a. What is the airport elevation?
- b. What is the Surface Outer limit distance of the Class D? This is the point at which the Special VFR Clearance terminates.
- c. Review the visibility and cloud distance requirements for SVFR; 1 mile, clear of clouds.
- d. Does the Sectional Chart show a Magenta circle around the airport? If so, this indicates a 700' AGL class G and a 1200' Class G respective ceiling.
- e. What will your altimeter read in MSL at the upper limit of Class G in the 700' AGL area and for the 1200' AGL area? In both cases, 700' or 1200', plus the airport field elevation.
- f. When you are at the upper

limit of the respective G airspace, 700 or 1200 feet AGL, you are considered by regulation to be in the Class G Airspace.

- g. Identify the charted obstacles that you must contend with if you fly in the Class G airspace after leaving the surface limit of the Class D.
- h. When departing the SVFR clearance limit, can you maintain Class G airspace cloud distance and visibility limits of 1 statute mile visibility and clear of clouds.

5. If you are trying to get from a SVFR qualified airport (one with a controlled surface airspace) to an airport that has only a Class G surface airspace, you cannot request a SVFR clearance to the destination airport. In this case, the destination airport is not qualified since the lateral surface airspace is uncontrolled Class G and thereby does not qualify for SVFR Operations. To make this trip, you must be able to maintain either Class G or Class E visibility and cloud distance requirements, depending as to where you intend to fly.

6. What determines if an airport is qualified for SVFR? A Special VFR clearance can only be given to an airport that has a surface Class B, C, D or E airspace structure.

7. If the airport in question has a qualified surface airspace structure, but the SVFR is requested during official night time hours, what requirement of the pilot and the airplane must be met? Both the pilot and the airplane must be instrument qualified and equipped.

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