OLYMPICS RESTRICTED AND PROHIBITED SECURITY AIRSPACE ZONES

The UK Civil Aviation Authority has confirmed the enforcement policy that will be in place to deal with infringements of this summer’s Olympics security airspace restrictions.

The existing CAA policy of not generally pursuing a prosecution in cases when an airspace infringement is inadvertent, and the pilot has taken all reasonable steps to resolve the situation safely, will remain. However, as infringements of the security airspace are likely to have a significant impact on other airspace users, the licences of all pilots infringing either the Restricted or Prohibited Zone will be suspended pending an investigation of the incident.

The decision affects the Restricted Zone (marked on charts as R112), the Prohibited Zone (P111) and the smaller Paralympics’ Prohibited Zone (P114). The policy to suspend licences will not apply to the airspace restrictions covering the sailing events at Weymouth or other Olympics restrictions.

Phil Roberts, Assistant Director of Airspace Policy at the CAA, commented, “We realise that the security restrictions being put in place by the Government will have an impact on General Aviation (GA) during the Olympics. By working closely with the GA community we have achieved a significant reduction in their length and have ensured pilots have as much access to airspace as possible. The UK’s GA representative associations have been doing excellent work to help us brief their members and we now believe that the vast majority of pilots are well aware of the restrictions and will aim to abide by them. However, we also know that infringements do occur and it is right that pilots know in advance what action the CAA will be taking.”

All infringements of the Restricted or Prohibited Zones will be reported to the CAA by the Atlas Control military air traffic control unit controlling the Restricted Zone. Serious infringements that the security services deem as being a potential security threat are also likely to be intercepted by the UK military in the air and met on landing.

If the subsequent CAA investigation reveals that the infringement was inadvertent and the pilot safely dealt with the situation, by for example immediately contacting air traffic control and ensuring the aircraft’s transponder (if fitted) is on, then the suspension may be lifted.
Pilots not already in contact with Atlas Control or another ATC agency who believe they may have infringed the Olympics Restricted or Prohibited airspace should immediately contact the Distress and Diversion Cell on 121.5MHz. The controller will then ascertain their exact position and safely deal with the situation.

Matt Lee, Head of the CAA’s Aviation Regulation and Enforcement Department, added, “Over the past few years we’ve worked well with the general aviation community to ensure that the CAA’s reaction to airspace infringements is a sensible one that improves flight safety. We want to continue with that policy during the Olympics but we also have to realise that any infringement of the security restrictions could have a major impact on air traffic movements in the South East of England, causing costly delays.

“An infringement could also affect events at Olympic venues, and if military action is taken there will also be considerable cost. Given the wide consultation, notification and publicity in place for these airspace restrictions any pilot who subsequently infringes is unlikely to be someone displaying the attributes the CAA requires of a licence holder. It is important that we all play a part in ensuring the future reputation of UK aviation.”

Any pilots found to have deliberately infringed the security restrictions will be prosecuted under Article 161 of the Air Navigation Order. This is the same process that occurs today. Their licence will also remain suspended until the CAA’s investigation is complete.

Phil Roberts concluded, “We believe that it is vital that pilots are particularly vigilant during the Olympic period. If we see a number of infringements that result in military interceptions, and knock on disruption to major airports, then there is a real risk that the concessions that we have been able to agree to date will be rescinded and action will be taken to restrict access to airspace even further.”

The CAA also said that airfields that are within three nautical miles of the edge of the Restricted Zone that are given an exemption to continue operations and be exempt from the Restricted Zone requirements will be responsible for ensuring the rules of the exemption are adhered to. These airfields will be responsible for ensuring pilots are appropriately briefed and that the required daily liaison with Atlas Control takes place. If these requirements are not followed then the exemption may be rescinded.

Full details of the airspace changes being put in place for the London 2012 Olympics can be found at www.airspacesafety.com/olympics