Flight Plan changes go live

According to ICAO State Letter (AN 13/2.1-08/50) – 25th June 2008, “The nature and scope of the amendment [to flight plan content] is to update the ICAO model flight plan form in order to meet the needs of aircraft with advanced capabilities and the evolving requirements of automated air traffic management (ATM) systems, while taking into account compatibility with existing systems, human factors, training, cost and transition aspects.”

Worldwide implementation of ICAO Flight Plan changes were due to take effect on 15th November this year. Amendments to flight plan content go to the very core of flight plan processing and 15th November 2012 is the ultimate deadline: after that date, current or old format flight plan messages will no longer be accepted.

Aircraft operators were requested to begin filing flight plans in the new format from 12th November onwards, so as to ensure that by 15th November, only new format data are in the systems.

The main changes affect:

Field 10 in the standard flight plan, the section describing the equipment carried by the aircraft (and its capabilities)
the way in which this information is described in Field 18
the ability to file up to five days in advance of the estimated off-block time (EOBT) using the date of flight (DOF).

Although the changes require system modifications, it is important, ICAO emphasise, to realise that much more information is now needed on the flight’s communication, navigation and surveillance capabilities.

It is understood that this will have significant impact on anyone who creates or receives flight plan messages: air navigation service providers (ANSPs), aircraft operators, air traffic services reporting offices (AROs) and flight plan service providers.

In preparing the migration to the new format Flight Plan over the last few months, the Network Manager organised a number of validation exercises – more than 600 people took part in them.
It is essential, ICAO stressed, for all those involved in the operational preparation and maintenance of flight plans to have sound knowledge and understanding of these capabilities as well as know about crew qualification, aircraft certification, approvals and so forth.