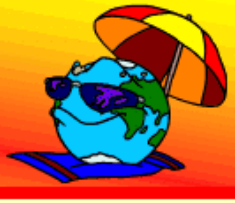
Summer 2007



Aviation Update...

Marty Trexler

Flight Services Consolidation.

Lockheed Martin was awarded a contract late last year by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), to reorganize and consolidate weather briefing operations performed by FAA Flight Service Stations (FSS). The process continues, with the usual growing pains, and will continue through much of this year.

Future Aviation Weather Forecasts.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and National Weather Service (NWS) are working together to develop a better way to get weather information to the aviation community. For decades, text-based weather information, AIRMETs (Airmen's Meteorological Information) have provided a broad-scale description of hazardous aviation weather. This summer, this enroute, aviation weather product will be called Graphical Area Forecast (GFA). The first part of a phased approach towards implementation of the GFA, will be called "Graphical-AIRMET" (G-AIRMET), which promises to provide a decision-making tool based on weather "snapshots" at shorter time intervals. The G-AIRMET will be able to identify hazardous weather in space and time more precisely than text, enabling pilots to maintain higher safety margins while flying efficient routes. It will use interactive and easy to understand graphical displays, which will depict weather aviation hazards across the county. Testing of the experimental G-AIRMET will be this summer, and then sent forward to the FAA for regulatory approval.

Changes to Aviation Forecasting in the National Weather Service.

The National Weather Service Instruction 10-813, for the preparation of Terminal Aerodrome Forecasts (TAFs), is in the process of being updated and will be out late this summer. One of the significant changes will be to TAF writing. Currently, a NWS TAF consists of the expected meteorological conditions significant to aviation at an airport (terminal) for a 24 hour time period. The U.S. definition of a terminal is the area within five (5) statute miles of the center of an airport's runway complex. Forecasters must also keep in mind the Critical TAF Period; defined as the first 2-6 hours of the TAF. Over the past several years, if information sources, such as surface observations, were missing, unreliable, or not complete, forecasters could NIL a TAF, i.e. stop writing a TAF, due to not knowing the latest weather information. Now forecasters will append NIL AMD to the end of a TAF. A NIL TAF should not be issued, with one exception. In cases where observations have been missing (i.e. no observation at all due to total Automated Surface Observing System-ASOS failure) for extended periods of time (i.e. more than one TAF cycle of six hours), and the total observation concept cannot provide sufficient information to construct a TAF (e.g. data sparse regions) then a NIL TAF may be used.