

CertAlert

DOT/Federal Aviation Administration, Southern Region Airports Division,
Airport Certification Safety Team, P.O. Box 20636, ASO-620, Atlanta, Georgia 30320
(404) 305-6700 (404) 305-6730 FAX

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This CertAlert pertains to:
All FAR Part 139 airports

Airfield Self-Inspections

The following is text from a recent investigation of a Vehicle Pedestrian Deviation (VPD) at a Southern Region airport:

During an early morning (8:28AM, 01/31/04) airfield self-inspection, CFR980 (an airport vehicle) with one operator was operating on runway 27. The driver was instructed by the ATCT to hold short of runway 18R and the driver acknowledged the clearance restriction. While approaching runway 18R on runway 27, the driver stated that he thought he saw smoke coming from an airfield sign. He later stated that this distraction caused him to inadvertently cross runway 18R. CFR980 crossed runway 18R as FDX648 (B727) was beginning its takeoff roll.

One of the recommendations made to the airport subsequent to the event was for the airport to consider instituting a policy requiring a minimum of two persons in a vehicle during airfield self-inspections. We offer this recommendation to all Southern Region airports for consideration.

We often see situations where drivers are distracted while operating on the airport, and we often see situations where a less than complete self-inspection was completed merely due to the simple fact that the driver was task saturated with driving, looking, writing, communicating on the radio, and/or talking on the phone. On a busy airport, on a busy day, one can quickly become overwhelmed. Even the most experienced operations person can fall victim to task saturation.

With the complexity of many Southern Region airports, and the importance of identifying all safety violations during all self-inspections, we believe that it would be beneficial to have one person driving and communicating, while the other person identifies and records airfield safety issues. Division of responsibility has been shown to be beneficial in other contexts, particularly in situations where task saturation can lead to distractions.

We understand that implementation of this recommendation is not possible at many airports due to staffing restrictions. However, at airports that can afford to place two people in the vehicle during self-inspections, we believe that it would offer considerable safety benefits – and just may prevent another VPD investigation like the one described above.

-- From your Airport Certification Safety Team