



SAFETY GRAM

September 2020

“Everybody talks about the weather, but nobody does anything about it.” – Mark Twain

Here is your chance to do something about it! PIREPs, or Pilot Reports, are a critical element to accomplishing a safe flight in both IFR and VFR conditions. PIREPs have the unique ability to give ACTUAL weather conditions at specific points. That’s something even the best weather forecaster cannot ever accomplish.

PIREPs can be obtained from many sources: Base Weather; Flight Service; Flight Watch; ATC and available online services. They can be extremely helpful in making go/no-go decisions when different forecasts have conflicting information or the forecast is close to legal or your personal minimums. They are also very useful in rapidly changing weather conditions when the forecaster can’t keep up with the current situation. Most of the time you’ll get the ‘worst case’ condition because forecasters tend to err on the conservative side. That’s fine, but you may be cancelling sorties when it’s actually perfectly safe to fly.

In order to use a PIREP, another pilot must first give one. Usually this only happens when a pilot is asked to report one or there is a significant event (icing, turbulence) that wasn’t briefed during the preflight preparation. Giving a PIREP even when you are flying in ‘good’ weather conditions not only helps the next pilot or aircrew, it also helps the forecaster to amend their forecast and validate their predictions for future forecasts.

There are standard forms you can get to help when you are learning to give a PIREP, but basically all you need to do is include the Who, What, Where, and When of your situation. Here’s a brief synopsis of these areas:

Who – Aircraft Type. This is important because a report from a B-747 might mean something different than one from a C-172.

Where – Location (nearest airport or VOR) and altitude.

When – Time in Zulu

What – This is the biggest part. It includes:

- Cloud coverage, altitudes and types (e.g., Scattered cumulus layer with bases at 5,000 ft)
- Visibility, to include any restrictions like smoke
- Precipitation, type and severity
- Temperature
- Wind speed and direction
- Turbulence to include severity
- Icing to include type and severity

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The report doesn't have to be all inclusive, and can be as simple as a call to tower after takeoff stating, "N12345 entered the clouds at 500 feet." Get with your instructor, look in AIM, or check any of the other resources out there to get more specifics on PIREPs. A good technique is to make a PIREP on every flight outside your local area.

CONTINUE TO FLY SAFE!

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