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MALICIOUS INTERFERENCE TO VHF COMMUNICATIONS SERVICES

1 Introduction

1.1 National Air Traffic Services Ltd and other aerodrome or airport operators of aeronautical VHF services are experiencing an increase in the malicious use of the aeronautical VHF mobile band by persons who deliberately impersonate Air Traffic Control Officers and the types of messages they broadcast.

1.2 Problems caused by these incidents have so far been minimised due to the experience of pilots and Air Traffic Control Officers receiving these communications.

1.3 Other types of interference from other radio services are sometimes received on VHF channels however, it is usually clear that these are non-aeronautical transmissions. Their origins are normally quickly identified and the problem resolved. This is not the case with malicious transmissions.

2 Identification of Malicious Transmissions

2.1 Pilots and Controllers should be aware that illegal transmissions can occur; the malicious messages transmitted may sometimes be identified by:

- (a) A change in the individuality of the transmissions, ie the controller's voice characteristics are not those previously experienced;
- (b) the message transmitted is out of context with the expected next message; it is obviously in error or uses incorrect phraseology;
- (c) the messages are usually transmitted for a short time only and not repeated when queried;
- (d) the signal is sometimes received only by the pilot or controller, not both.

3 Action to be taken if Illegal Transmissions are suspected

3.1 Inform the local Air Traffic Control Officer in charge that illegal transmissions are suspected and describe the content, character, type and location where the transmissions were received.

3.2 The local Air Traffic Control Officer will then take action to confirm the occurrence and will inform the nearest National and Regional OFCOM Office, OFCOM being the Government Organisation empowered to prosecute under the Wireless Telegraphy Act.

3.3 If illegal transmissions do occur, it is important that the best available evidence for a prosecution be collected as soon as possible. Within United Kingdom legislation there exist various Acts of Parliament that are relevant to this situation. In terms of the usage of radio services, the relevant ones are the Wireless Telegraphy Act of 1949 and the Telecommunications Act of 1984. It has been determined from a Civil Aviation aspect that the Aviation Security Act of 1982 is a relevant statute in cases of interference.

3.4 Original tapes of communications received by the ground must be preserved where possible. They can be copied to enable transcription and afterwards be 'proved' by formal witness statement from the Air Traffic Control Officer whose voice appears on the tape. The detail of any incident may appear on the tape recording of ATC communications and it is this which is the most important piece of evidence. Advice from the CAA Legal Investigations Branch can be obtained if ATC providers are unclear on what action to take or what to preserve when cases arise.

Note: Aircraft voice cockpit recorders may provide additional information, however, any action to retain information of this sort would conflict with the primary intention of these devices and aircraft operational procedures. Therefore, cockpit voice recorder information is not considered to be part of this procedure.

3.5 Whatever the type of evidence, it is vital to protect its 'integrity', meaning that the evidence is genuine and obtained in a proper manner in accordance with the Codes of Practice issued by the Home Secretary under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (or Scottish equivalent). In addition the evidence must have 'continuity' at all times. Continuity means that there is a continuous record of each stage in the gathering of the evidence and its handling, including steps taken to ensure it is not tampered with and that it is securely kept, from the time the evidence is obtained until the moment it is presented in court.

3.6 If there is consistent interference at a location, a general warning NOTAM action should be effected until investigations have been completed.

Note: The CAA operates a **Mandatory** Occurrence Reporting Scheme, which includes incidents of this kind. This enables the CAA, NATS and OFCOM to determine whether the incidence of interference is increasing.

4 Continued Vigilance

4.1 Pilots and controllers should ensure that, if necessary, they ask for a repeat of messages that are unclear, inconsistent or not in accordance with the CAA Radio Telephony Manual CAP 413.

4.2 Owners of VHF air band transmitters should make every effort to ensure that they are operated only by licensed persons and that they are not made available for unlicensed use.

This Circular is issued for information, guidance and necessary action.