



Safety recommendation no. 481

Date of the publication	15.09.2014
Number of the final report	2203
Safety deficit	<p>Since 2008, at Zurich Airport or in its immediate vicinity, comparable serious incidents such as that on 22 August 2012 have occurred in which special flights have contributed to the occurrence of the respective serious incident.</p> <p>Also, in the case in question, a complex touch-and-go training flight was taking place on different runways at a time when the traffic volume was increasing and complex.</p>
Safety recommendation	The Federal Office of Civil Aviation (FOCA) should, in cooperation with Zurich Airport and skyguide air navigation services, lay down basic conditions for the safe handling of special flights or where necessary amend the same.
Addressees	BAZL Bundesamt für Zivilluftfahrt; BAZL Bundesamt für Zivilluftfahrt; BAZL Bundesamt für Zivilluftfahrt
Stage of the implementation	<p>Partially implemented. Skyguide notified the following measures: "The VFR turns which are complex for air traffic control have been greatly restricted at Zurich airport and must additionally be linked with special conditions.</p> <p>Skyguide has included the subject of special flights in periods of heavy traffic in its ongoing training programme. It involves further increasing the already high degree of complexity of the airport system due to the handling of special flights. The findings have also been included in the "Best Practice" guide for the basic training of air traffic controllers."</p> <p>The FOCA commented in a letter of 14 Februar 2017 as follows: "Since the serious incident at Zurich Airport and the publication of safety recommendation no. 481, the following two measures have been adopted at Zurich Airport:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Mandatory briefing by means of web-based safety training for VFR pilots of fixed-wing aircraft, which is valid for three years (see VFR guide LSZH AD INFO §1.6.2)2. Prohibition of aerodrome circuits for fixed-wing aircraft. Local flights with a flight time of less than 20 minutes as well as touch-and-go landings are generally prohibited (see VFR guide LSZH AD INFO §1.6.3) <p>Any decision on whether further adjustments to the general conditions are needed requires an awareness of the risks related to special flights (VFR RAC 4-0 §7). On 7th February 2017, the FOCA asked Skyguide to set out these risks."</p>

In a letter dated 20 July 2018, FOCA communicated the following:

Based on the safety recommendation and the steadily increasing number of applications for drone flights, Skyguide decided to adapt the process for handling special flights. After having compiled a list of all stakeholder requirements, the selection of the technical platform would be expedited. The project team was currently working on developing the process and, following the completion of its validation, the new process (including the planned user platform) should be implemented as planned by the end of December 2018.

In a letter dated 14 December 2020, the FOCA informed that an initial adaptation of the Special Flight Office (SFO) process in the direction of digitisation/automation had been approved by the FOCA on 9 December 2020. The change would digitise part of the SFO process at skyguide. All special flights are thus requested via an application instead of being exchanged by e-mail using pdf forms. This change would have an impact on the processing of all special flight requests throughout Switzerland. Interactions with special flight operators would be handled entirely via the SFO tool for Geneva, Zurich, Dubendorf and Lugano airports. For regional and military aerodromes, the change would be transparent, as they would continue to receive the same submissions and follow the same procedure for handling and approving these special flights. In all cases, the decision to approve a special flight would be made at the tactical level on the day of the flight by the supervisor.

While for the change released on 9 December 2020, special flights would be approved at the tactical level, the future vision of this project would be to automatically approve special flights whenever possible. The use of U-Space Facility Maps (UFM) for automatic authorisation would still need to be demonstrated. The next report would be in June 2021 after receiving the experience reports from Skyguide.

**Investigation report concerning
the safety recommendation**

Final report
Schlussbericht
