



*International Civil Aviation Organization*

**The Fourth Meeting of the Asia/Pacific ICAO Flight Plan and ATS Messages Implementation Task Force (FPL&AM/TF/4)**

Bangkok, Thailand, 2 – 3 June 2011

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**Agenda Item 6: Regional strategies for implementation**

**Flight Identification and Designators**

(Presented by IATA)

**SUMMARY**

This paper highlights the use of alphanumerics in Flight Identification and the use of suffix's to denote a delayed flight

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 In order to meet the needs of aircraft with advanced capabilities and the evolving requirements of automated air traffic management (ATM) systems, ICAO promulgated Amendment 1 to the PANS-ATM pertaining to the ICAO FPL & ATM messaging format by State letter in June 2008.
- 1.2 With every ICAO region having now established a Task force (or similar) to prepare for the changes, it is opportune to review some of the content of the Flight plan and note some potential impacts.

**2. DISCUSSION**

**Use of the suffix "D" to designate a delayed flight**

- 2.1 When a flight experiences a significant delay (i.e. 24H) into the next day, there is potential for two FPLs to exist with the same callsign. To alleviate this, airlines might append the suffix "D" in Item 7 of the FPL after the flight identification.
- 2.2 This is common practice among many operators in order to:
  - Distinguish from the same call sign flight operating the next day
  - Retain overflight permissions associated with aircraft designators
  - Maintain commonality with passenger notification systems
- 2.3 This practice however is not "standardised" however and may lead to confusion between both operators and ANSPs where flights may need to "change callsigns" as they progress in their flight.
- 2.4 In other regions, States may require other indicators. For example the suffix "X" when delayed by 24 hours and "Y" when delayed by 48 hours.

- 2.5 For States where specific overflight approval is required, the use of an appropriate designator is extremely important as a change in Flight Identification can mean overflight approval is denied.
- 2.6 With the transition currently underway, it is an opportune time to consider the implication of these events and potentially standardise the application of procedures associated.

### **Alphanumerics in Flight ID**

- 2.7 Among the amendments, Item 7, Flight Identification now stipulates:  
**“not exceeding 7 alphanumeric characters and without hyphens or symbols”**  
rather than 7 characters as previously.
- 2.8 The amendment indicates the following for airlines would typically apply:  
**“the ICAO designator for the aircraft operating agency followed by the flight identification (e.g.KLM511, NGA213, JTR25)”**  
reflecting the guidance in Annex 10, Volume II, Chapter 5.
- 2.9 With the first 3 alphanumerics assigned by ICAO to designate the airline operating agency, airlines typically use three numerical characters for flight identification on scheduled flights. The last character is sometimes used for other purposes (e.g. delayed flights) although 4 numerical characters are sometimes used as well, typically for non-scheduled flights.
- 2.10 The normal combination with 3 numerical characters allows for 1000 scheduled flights (although the number 000 is not used), hence for normal operations 500 return flights.
- 2.11 With airlines expanding their operations and several large mergers, the reality is that 1000 flight identifications may not fulfill future needs.
- 2.12 While the use of 4 numerical characters does provide possibilities, this does preclude the use of the final character to designate delayed flights or for other purposes (as noted above).
- 2.13 There is a real possibility that airlines may start using a combination of numbers and characters for flight identification. It is important that this change is noted by States in the planning of their new systems

### **3. ACTION BY THE MEETING**

- 3.1 The meeting is invited to discuss:
- The use of a suffix in item 7 to denote a delayed flight
  - Consider the suitability of the suffix's already used (D, X or Y)
  - The potential for standardising the use of a suffix
  - The potential for alphanumerics to be used in various combinations to denote flight identification.

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