PUBLIC NOTICE

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
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UPDATE: AIRCRAFT RADIOS TO BE REPLACED BY JANUARY 1, 1997

This notice responds to recent inquiries from the general aviation community concerning the frequency tolerance and channel spacing requirements for aircraft radios. As of January 1, 1997, each VHF aircraft radio used on board a U.S. aircraft must be type accepted by the FCC as meeting a 30 parts-per-million (ppm) frequency tolerance (47 C.F.R. § 87.133). The vast majority of aircraft radios that have been type accepted under the 30 ppm frequency tolerance utilize 25 kHz spacing and have 720 or 760 channels. Each aircraft radio has a label with an FCC ID number on the unit. The FCC ID number may be checked against the "FCC Aircraft Radio List" in order to determine whether the unit has been type accepted as meeting the 30 ppm frequency tolerance. The FCC Aircraft Radio List is available through the Commission's fax-on-demand service at (202) 418-0177 (call from the handset of your fax machine, follow the recorded instructions, and select document retrieval number 000013), via the internet World Wide Web at http://www.fcc.gov/wtb/avmarsrv.html, or via email request to mayday@fcc.gov.

This rule applies to all U.S. aircraft radio stations, including those no longer required to be licensed individually. The effect of this rule is to require a 30 ppm type accepted radio to be placed on board if the pilot intends to use a VHF aircraft radio for communications. There is no requirement, however, for an older radio to be removed from an aircraft in cases where the pilot does not intend to use it to transmit radio signals (*e.g.*, receive-only operation, an integral part of a navigation/communications unit, or decoration in a vintage aircraft).

A radio which has not been type accepted as 30 ppm may not be returned to service by simply changing the crystals, or adjusting the unit to meet the 30 ppm frequency tolerance. The only way to bring a unit into compliance is through the installation of an FCC type accepted "upgrade kit," which may be available from the unit's manufacturer. Like the radio itself the upgrade kit will have an FCC ID number that may be verified against the FCC Aircraft Radio List. Presently, however, few manufacturers offer FCC type accepted upgrade kits. If a kit is not available for a particular model of radio, the radio may not be adjusted and used for communications purposes on board an aircraft on or after January 1, 1997. If no kit is available, the radio may be reinstalled in the aircraft so long it is not intended to be used to transmit radio signals.

The Commission adopted the 30 ppm frequency tolerance in 1984 in order to conform its rules with those adopted internationally in the Final Acts of the World Administrative Radio Conference, Geneva, 1979. At that time, this action was endorsed by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and was strongly supported by Aeronautical Radio, Inc., the Air Line Pilots Association, the Air Transport Association, and the National Business Aircraft Association, Inc. This action was found to be consistent with the FAA's three-phase plan to implement 25 kHz channel spacing in the 118-137 MHz band, which creates more radio channels for use by pilots. These organizations also noted that users of older radios would have limited access to FAA air traffic control channels, would experience flight delays in FAA controlled air space, and would be unable to utilize newly available aviation frequencies in the 136-137 MHz band. Based on comments by the FAA and the other groups listed above, the Commission determined that permitting the continued operation of older radios type accepted prior to 1974 would pose a threat to safety in air navigation.

The Commission has taken steps to minimize the impact of this rule change on small entities and private pilots, including: (1) providing over a decade for the transition to more efficient radio equipment, (2) not requiring radios to be removed from aircraft in cases where pilots does not intend to use them to transmit radio signals (*e.g.*, receive-only operation, an integral part of a navigation/communications unit, or decoration in a vintage aircraft), and (3) giving manufacturers the flexibility to type accept and market "upgrade kits."

For further information, contact the Private Wireless Division at (202) 418-0680.

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