



Interagency Aviation SAFETY ALERT



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Subject: Properly Refusing Unnecessary Risk in Aviation

Area of Concern: Aviation Safety

Distribution: All Aviation Operations and Dispatch Centers

Discussion: This Safety Alert revisits [*IA SA 16-02 How to Properly Refuse Risk in Aviation*](#). This year some aircrews are voicing concerns about those who either order or dispatch aviation resources of “aircraft shopping” after missions have been declined by other flight crews. Flight crews are constantly under pressure to accept a mission regardless of what they deem as acceptable or unacceptable risk. Whether real or perceived, they are fearful that their decision will be unduly scrutinized and that the reasoning behind their refusal will not be communicated to other flight crews who are asked to perform the same mission.

Refusing to accept a mission is often referred to as a “turn-down” or “refusal of risk”. The “turn down” protocol is an integral element that improves the effective management of risk by providing for timely identification of hazards within the chain of command, raising risk awareness for both leaders and subordinates, and promoting accountability.

Procedures for refusing risk are not only supported, but are clearly identified in:

- The Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations 2021, chapter 16, page 329 at: <https://www.nifc.gov/sites/default/files/redbook-files/Chapter16.pdf>, and
- The Incident Response Pocket Guide (IRPG) on page 19 of the April 2018 version at: <https://www.nwcg.gov/sites/default/files/publications/pms461.pdf>

A “refusal of risk” or “turn-down” is a situation where an individual, aircrew or organization has determined that the assignment is unsafe, they cannot accept it as given, and are unable to negotiate an alternative solution. Refusing an assignment must be based on assessment of risks and the ability of the individual, crew, or organization to control or mitigate those risks. Every individual (government and contracted employees) has the right and obligation to report safety concerns affecting their safety as well as the right to contribute ideas that mitigate the risks. In return, supervisors, requesting units, fire and aviation managers are expected to give these concerns and ideas serious consideration.



Turning down an assignment is one possible outcome of properly managing risk. In aviation, the Pilot In Command (PIC) of the aircraft has the final authority to decide to fly or not fly the mission and may refuse any request due to valid concerns which might include (but not limited to): weather, visibility, inadequate communication, flight time limitations, airspace issues, crew fatigue, violations of policy/regulations, aircraft capabilities/performance/limitations, or crew comfort level.



Key Points:

1. Individuals, aircrews, or organizations must base turn down decisions on assessment of risk.
2. Individuals, aircrews, or organizations will **directly inform the requestor that they are turning down the assignment as assigned/requested**. The most common means of documented turn down criteria is using the Twelve Standard Aviation Questions That Shout “Watch Out” shown below.

Twelve Standard Aviation Questions That Shout “Watch Out!”	
1. Is this flight necessary?	7. Can you justify your actions?
2. Who is in charge?	8. Are there other aircraft in the area?
3. Are all hazards identified and have you made them known?	9. Do you have an escape route?
4. Should you stop the operation on the flight due to change in conditions?	10. Are any rules being broken?
☐ Communications ☐ Weather ☐ Confusion	11. Are communications getting tense?
☐ Turbulence ☐ Personnel ☐ Conflicting Priorities	12. Are you deviating from the assigned operations of flight?
5. Is there a better way to do it?	Anyone can refuse or curtail a flight when an unsafe condition may exist. Never let undue pressure (expressed or implied) influence your judgement or decisions. Avoid mistakes, don't hurry!
6. Are you driven by an overwhelming sense of urgency?	
NFES 1129 (1998)	NFES 1129 (1998)

3. After a turn down by an individual, aircrew, or organization, **any resource being asked to perform the same mission under the same circumstances must be informed at the time of request, that it was previously turned down and the reason(s) why it was turned down by another crew**. Additionally, the reason(s) for the turn down must be documented by the receiving unit.
4. If an unresolved safety hazard exists, the individual, aircrew or organization needs to communicate the issue/event/concern immediately their supervisors by the most expeditious means available followed by **documenting it as appropriate** within the [SAFECON](#) system.
5. Any **threat or retaliation**, implied or otherwise regarding release from assignment, adverse contract action or reassignment based on refusing unnecessary risk **shall be reported to Regional/State and National Aviation Safety Managers**, who will coordinate with the respective aircraft program manager and contracting officer.

/s/ Keith C. Raley

/s/ Lori Clark

Keith C. Raley
Chief, Aviation Safety, Training, Program
Evaluation, and Quality Management
DOI, Office of Aviation Services

Lori Clark
Branch Chief - Aviation Safety Management
Systems
USDA, Forest Service