# General Aviation Security Guidelines and Recommendations

**Purpose.** To more clearly define security concerns and steps that can be taken at mid-size and smaller general aviation airports. These recommendations are intended to fall in line with the new regulations governing airport and air carrier security requirements now contained in 49 CFR Parts 1540, 1542 and 1544.

**Overview.** General Aviation includes a broad range of aircraft and aviation activity. GA airports vary greatly in size, function and operational characteristics. As of October 2003, federal authorities have not imposed any requirement to implement security measures at GA airports. Currently, general aviation organizations have been working with the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) to develop security recommendations for GA airports of all sizes. Their report is expected calendar year 2003. Many GA airport managers commonly enforce security measures typically found at commercial service airports. Examples include fencing and access control devices for vehicle and pedestrian gates, daily airfield inspections, landside and airfield signage and public awareness programs for educating the aviation community as well as the general public on the safe and efficient use of the facility.

However, many general aviation airports, especially those located in rural or remote areas, have very few, if any, security measures in place. Some of these same airports are unattended day and night. Given our nation's heightened sense of awareness, terrorists would likely prefer to base an attack close to their intended target to minimize the chance of interception by military aircraft. Less active and remote facilities pose less of an immediate security risk than other more active airports located closer to obvious targets such as population centers. Consequently, security measures would vary for different types of airports.

**Proposed Airport Security Measures.** Security measures should be developed for different categories of airports to address vulnerabilities and mitigate varying threat levels. Suggestions have been made to place the different categories of airports into a class according to the varied levels of security risk posed such as:

Class 1. FAA-designated reliever airports, or airports with a runway length of 5,500 feet or greater.

Class 2. Airports with a runway length less than 5,000 feet but greater than 3,500 feet.

Class 3. Airports with a runway length of 3,500 feet or less.

## Security Measures Required For All Airport Categories

1) **Securing Unattended Aircraft.** In an effort to prevent the theft and/or unauthorized use of an aircraft, each aircraft owner or operator should be encouraged to take steps to secure their aircraft at all times when it is unattended. Possible options to consider include:
   a) Installing anti-theft devices on and/or within their aircraft when not in use.
   b) Installing devices to lock aircraft flight control surfaces when not in use.
   c) Removing the keys to their aircraft, of applicable, and lock all doors when not in use.
   d) Installing other lockable devices to secure their aircraft to the ground.
   e) Locking doors on the aircraft storage hangars at all times when not in use.

   These measures could be included in the tie-down lease agreement. Lockable devices should be compatible to the specific type of aircraft.

2) **Reporting Unusual or Suspicious Activity.** Similar to previous guidance by the FAA, a process for reporting unusual or suspicious activity should be standardized. The airport operator and all tenants should post such a notice in highly visible, conspicuous locations. AOPA in conjunction with the TSA has developed a nationwide Airport Watch Program. AOPA Airport Watch is supported by a centralized government provided toll free hotline (1-866-GA-SECURE) and system for reporting and acting on information provided by general aviation pilots. The Airport Watch Program includes warning signs for airports, informational literature, and training videotape to educate pilots and airport employees as to how security of their airports and aircraft can be enhanced. In addition, airport operators should initiate discussions with tenants and local law enforcement to ensure cooperation and coordination.

3) **Airport Security Plans.** Operators of general aviation airports should develop their own airport security plan. Consideration of appropriate standards for each airport category mentioned earlier should be given. The TSA is in the process of developing a self-inspection checklist to airport operators for their use in maintaining compliance with the new security standards. Following are some suggestions to include in a checklist which would need to be modified according to each airport's specific needs:

   a) Is there a comprehensive written security plan? Is it current?
   b) Is there a security officer? What are their hours?
   c) Have bomb threat procedures been developed? Are drills conducted?
   d) What is the Fire Department response time?
   e) Are emergency phone numbers readily available to all staff?
   f) Are background checks performed annually on all personnel with access to airport facilities and aircraft?
   g) Who has access to aircraft and vehicles?
   h) If someone unknown enters, are they challenged as to their authorization to be in an operations area?

i) What are the field operating hours?
j) Does perimeter fencing meet normal security guidelines?
k) Is fencing patrolled on a regular basis?
l) How many access gates are there? How is access gained?
m) Is there adequate night lighting?
n) Are there security cameras? If so, how many and are they in working order?
o) Are hangars locked at night?
p) Is there fuel farm/truck security?
q) Is emergency power available?
r) How are aircraft secured?
s) Are aircraft keys secured?

Assigning the position of Airport Security Coordinator is also recommended. The bigger, more active airports should create an Airport Security Team comprised of a representative from airport management, airport tenants and users, and local law enforcement officials. The team's role should not be to write the security plan, but rather advise the Coordinator on issues affecting airport security. The security plan should be a written document, and it should be updated and approved periodically. At a minimum, airport security plans should include:

a) A list of contact data for airport users including tenants and based aircraft owners.
b) General and specific airport security standards.
c) Procedures for reporting suspicious activity.
d) Procedures for emergency response and communication.
e) Identification of the Aircraft Operating Area (AOA).
f) Revise signage and access points if necessary.

Given the sensitive nature of this issue, it is advised not to distribute, disclose or make available any sensitive information that could compromise airport security. Airport Operators may want to have lease agreements address security issues.

**Additional Security Measures Recommended For All Airport Categories**

4) **Public Awareness and Education.** A public awareness program should be developed to educate airport management, airport users, public safety officials and other community leaders as well as the general public on a wide range of issues involving the safe and proper use of airport facilities with a particular emphasis on security.
For instance, airport management could benefit from communicating more with airport tenants, paying more attention to airport users (airside and landside), engaging users for advice on ways to improve security while still maintaining an acceptable level of service. They could also benefit from recurrent security awareness training. Public safety officials, namely local

police, could benefit from understanding airport user needs, learning about what constitutes suspicious activity, and most importantly, learning about standard airport operating procedures so as not to compromise airport or aircraft safety while performing police duties such as ground vehicle access to the AMA.

5) **Monitoring Airport Property and Users.** Airport operators should perform regular inspections of their property and airport facilities including the aircraft operating area, fence lines, fuel farms, etc. It is also essential to be aware of the area surrounding the airport as to whether it is privately owned, what is contained on the property and whether it could be considered a hazard to the airport. Communicating with the owners and exchanging contact information could prove to be beneficial in the event of an emergency situation.

   Airport users should be encouraged to organize and implement AOPA's Airport Watch Program.

6) **Controlling Movement in the AOA.** Airport operators should take reasonable measures to control the movement of persons, aircraft and ground vehicles in the aircraft operating area (AOA) by installing and maintaining appropriate airport signs, aircraft guidance signs, airfield lights and pavement markings adhering to FAA guidelines. It is important to communicate that unauthorized access to the AOA/AMA is a security breach and that tenants cooperation is greatly appreciated.

7) **Preventing Unauthorized AOA Access.** Airport operators should take measures to discourage unnecessary pedestrian and vehicular access into, and movement within, the AOA. If conditions warrant and funding permits, fencing and access control devices should be installed where appropriate. Pilots should be encouraged to walk to their planes instead of driving out on a ramp or apron. Within reason, airport operators should discourage the loading of supplies and equipment onto aircraft directly from ground vehicles without prior approval or supervision. Segregating aircraft and private ground vehicles increases airport safety and security.

## Other Issues

**FAA Pilot ID / Smart Card.** A new pilot ID smart card should replace the current FAA issued pilot ID. The new ID should include the pilot's photo and have special features such as holographics added to prevent counterfeit copying. This new smart card could be used to store certain data, including biometrics, for use by airport operators and government officials for verifying identification and for other security purposes. The ID should be renewed regularly, possibly every two years and a reasonable administrative cost should be charged to the pilot. This

program could be administered uniformly by the federal government and/or by each state, seeking assistance from the Department of Motor Vehicles and/or Passport Centers.

**ID Verification / Government Watch List.** Flight schools and FBOs should properly identify individuals requesting flight lessons, renting or purchasing an aircraft or joining a flying club by validating their credentials using a government issued photo ID card and by checking the name against a government issued watch list of potential terrorist operatives prior to engaging in business. It is recommended that a pilot program be developed to facilitate the ID check, by electronic means, against the government watch list. This pilot program should be safe and easy to use and it should also include the ability to automatically notify government authorities of a match. Upon ID verification, flight school and FBO personnel should engage their patrons to learn more about intended use of the aircraft, intended destination, length of rental, anticipated return dates/times, etc. Flight instructors should accompany student pilots during the pre-flight inspection. Flight schools may also want to consider having instructors personally distribute the aircraft keys to their students for all solo flights.

**Mutual Assistance / Resource Sharing.** An opportunity exists at the local level for sharing valuable local resources. Whenever appropriate, airport owners could provide low rent or rent-free space to local public safety officials including police and fire departments. Merely having a police presence on the airport will provide a natural deterrent to terrorism and other criminal activity. Having the local fire department on site will provide immediate response in case of on emergency. This could be accomplished if the FAA would make the necessary changes to offer public safety officials relief from paying fair market value on such leases, as long as an equivalent comparable level of service is provided for the lost revenue.

**Emergency Communication / Response Network.** It is recommended that airport operators develop and implement emergency procedures for responding to disasters, acts of terrorism, and other situations deemed to be an emergency if not already addressed in the Airport Emergency Plan. Among other things, establishing and maintaining a proper line of communication is critical to an effective response effort. It is important for state and local government officials to know whom to call in the event of an emergency. A single point of contact at all levels of government should be identified. Federal authorities must be included in the process, especially the FAA and the TSA. Time is of the essence during an emergency and it is very important that information flow efficiently from the source to its intended audience without being unnecessarily distorted.

**Conclusion.** The recommendations are broad and should be tailored to meet the specific needs of an airport according to its size and activity. Each plan should be geared to benefit the airport. Measures that would financially and operationally hinder the airport would not be conducive. Some factors to consider when determining the level of complexity of the plan should be the threat level facing the airport, the size of the facility, the number of based aircraft and businesses and if measures are reasonable and cost effective.

General aviation is an essential ingredient in the national air transportation system by providing an indispensable link between local communities, private businesses and government. General aviation supports economic development by providing flexible and efficient transportation of people and goods. Implementing meaningful and effective security measures at general aviation airports is essential if public confidence in the safety of air transportation is to be restored. By ensuring safe and secure operations, airport businesses such as FBOs, flight training schools, corporate users and other tenants will continue to provide the services and benefits that are inherent to general aviation.