

## Pilots: Are You Forgetting These Preflight Tasks?

by Sarina Houston 15. February 2015 source [globalair.com](http://globalair.com)

One of the benefits for pilots in the general aviation world is the ability to just “pick up and go” on a moment’s notice. General aviation, including business aviation, is less regulated than charter or airline operations. As such, the preflight preparation involved in a general aviation flight can often be quick and dirty, and familiar flights might only include a brief check of the weather and a quick walk-around of the aircraft.

Pilots are required by federal aviation regulation, specifically FAR 91.103, to become familiar with certain elements of preflight planning. There’s even an acronym – NWKRAFT – meant to help pilots remember the required items they must become familiar with before flying. The required preflight knowledge, and the meaning of the letters in NWKRAFT, include:

- NOTAMs
- Weather
- Known ATC Delays
- Runway lengths
- Alternates
- Fuel Requirements
- Takeoff/Landing Distances

It’s easy for pilots to become so familiar with their routes and aircraft that they feel that they don’t need to perform anything more than these required items to conduct a safe flight. But in addition to the basic requirements, there are a few other preflight items to consider. If you aren’t already incorporating these items as part of your preflight planning and preparation, consider adding them. After all, FAR 91.103 also states that pilots must become familiar with all available information prior to the flight. And isn’t it just better to be prepared?

### Winds aloft:

Although this one can be coupled with the generic requirement for checking the weather before a flight, the winds aloft are particularly important for those operators who hope to save fuel. Choosing a cruise altitude based on winds aloft can help save fuel, and alternatively, a quick check of the winds can also prevent you from running into a fuel shortage situation.

### GPS NOTAMs and RAIM:

If you’re using GPS as a primary navigation aid, then you should be sure to get GPS NOTAMs from flight service before your flight. Approaches go well as long as they’re predictable. Losing GPS would be a bad day for any pilot that relies on it. It probably won’t happen, but a quick check of the NOTAMs and RAIM availability will ensure that it’s even less likely.

### Fuel

The regulations require pilots to have enough fuel reserves for safe operation. But while you’re planning, you’ll want to scope out your fuel options, including where to find the cheapest fuel along

your route (try MaxTrax) or which FBOs will take your fuel card (look them up in our Airport Resource Center). It'll make it easier on everyone if you know ahead of time which FBO you want to use and if the FBO will honor your fuel card.

#### Pilot/crew currency

Don't forget to check for your own currency requirements. Obviously, you'll want to make sure you're IFR current before flying in IMC or on an IFR flight plan, but don't forget about the other currency requirements, like the flight review, and day and night requirements for carrying passengers, when applicable.

#### Avionics currency requirements

Along with your own currency, you'll want to make sure your avionics are up to date. Your GPS database should be current for IFR flight, and your altimeter, pitot-static system, and transponder should be inspected every 24 calendar months. And don't forget your VOR – the VOR needs to be checked every 30 days for IFR flight.

#### Local ops:

Bird conditions, noise abatement procedures and local airport and runway information should not be ignored during the flight planning process. (Did you know you can check the bird strike risk for major airports and routes on the Avian Hazard Advisory System website?)

#### TFRs:

Always check temporary flight restrictions before you fly. If you haven't been surprised by one yet, you will be at some point. You can check them in a variety of ways, but online and through flight service stations are the most common.

#### Weight & Balance

Pilots who only fly one airplane become adept at doing weight and balance calculations for that aircraft in their minds, but when the load is heavier than usual or the flight is going to operate with different passenger or baggage loads than normal, nothing substitutes for an actual weight and balance calculations. Make sure you know the aircraft limits, as well as how the aircraft will perform when heavy.

#### Airport/FBO Operating Hours

Sometimes it's the simple things that escape us, like whether or not the airport or FBO will be open when our flight arrives. It might not matter at times, but if you need fuel, restrooms or something to eat when you get there, you might want to double check the operating hours. In addition, it never hurts to call ahead and make sure there is ramp space available. This is especially important for larger aircraft at small airports.

Have preflight planning tips of your own? Share them with us.