

"Why Have Rules" and the Impact on Safety

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In case you missed it, aviation has rules that are intended to be followed. But why? Simply put, the system we operate in has rules built in to protect everyone operating within the system. The best example of this is collision avoidance. We have altitude rules that build in separation between aircraft, so long as everyone follows the rules. Remember "West to East is Odd, East to West is Even"? At a basic level, this rule provides for separation of at least 500 feet when you include VFR and IFR aircraft operations in the same area. Different classes of airspace have different sets of rules for the same purpose. Class A, B, C and D are all created and operated to keep traffic separated through cooperation and informed control. This is clearly a high priority safety concern. There are many other scenarios where safety mitigations are built into the rules we routinely follow.

So, the question is, what happens when the rules are not followed and what can someone expect to have happen to them if there is a "non-compliance" event?

A recent article in the [FAA Safety Briefing](#) tells the tale. What happens is conveyed in what is called the FAA Compliance Program. From the article "The Compliance Program has, at its foundation, an appreciation for transparency and an expected willingness/ability to prevent reoccurrence of the noncompliance".

The program tries to address mistakes that can happen from time to time for a number of reasons through "non-enforcement" actions like counseling or remedial training and education programs.

Again, from the article "In all cases, the intent is to address the root cause of the issue to preclude it from happening again." The FAA, while trying to be helpful and prevent safety issues, also says that the compliance program is not intended to be a "get out of jail free card" for intentional deviations from the rules. At the opposite end of the spectrum are legal remedies including certificate actions or other civil penalties. This is typically a very small number of cases representing the extreme measures that can be necessary to avoid potentially severe safety occurrences.

In most cases where rules violations do occur, the expectation is that the violator will take immediate action to correct the error and thus mitigate the potential safety impact as soon as possible. Honest mistakes are difficult to eliminate completely so knowing how to deal with them when they occur is important to prevent further instances of such mistakes. The FAA has realized that a heavy hand is not often the best course of action. As an alternative the FAA has set up the FAA Safety Team as a way of disseminating safety information and, through the use of experienced aviation professionals as representatives, provides a foundation for addressing the majority of deviations from the rules without the need for punitive enforcement actions.

For more information, please see the links below on the FAA safety program as well as the link to the FAA Safety Briefing article.

- [FAA Safety Team](#)
- [FAA Safety Briefing Article](#)

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