



## **AVIATION, PLASTIC, & YOU!**

### **For Pilots, Mechanics, and Others**

For those of us old enough to remember the movie “The Graduate”, starring Dustin Hoffman, there is a famous line in the movie when a relative is providing guidance to Dustin’s character about the future. “PLASTICS.” And, we know that plastics have become a major part of our lives, including, in some cases, aircraft construction – which now uses both plastics and composites.

Then there is the other famous line in the form of a question and answer, “What makes an airplane fly? It’s not power, lift, or speed. (Are you surprised by that statement?) It is PLASTIC!” In this case it often refers to the fact that credit cards are what are most often used to get the essentials for flight – including aircraft rentals, fuel, charts, etc. That would even include the obligatory white scarf.

Now, however, plastic has a whole new meaning in aviation – for all airmen, pilots and non-pilots alike. In this case we are referring to the plastic airman certificates that are now part of our world. Those came about following many suggestions about having certificates that were more “secure” and tamper proof (by adding things like holograms). Of course, the events of 9/11/2001 put additional impetus on that and resulted in the FAA issuing requirements that all paper certificates be replaced with plastic certificates by certain dates. That does not apply to temporary certificates or student pilot certificates, but it does apply to all other airmen (pilot and non-pilot alike) certificates. [Disclaimer – Ladies – Airmen is an FAA term, even though it does not appear in the term list in 14 CFR Part 1.1, not one chosen by the author. See 14CFR Part 1.3(3)]

### **Pilots (and all certificates issued under 14CFR Part 61)**

In the case of certificates under Part 61 (pilots, flight instructors, ground instructors, etc.), the deadline for conversion to the plastic certificates was March 31, 2010. [See 14CFR Part 61.19(g) for specific expiration wording.] What this means is if you do not have a plastic pilot certificate in your possession now, you may NOT exercise any privileges of your certificate. I.e., you cannot go flying as a pilot or work as a CFI or GI! (Most CFIs would have already renewed with plastic (or have expired), due to expiration/renewal requirements, but since GI certificates have no expiration date this applies to them. A CFI who did not also convert their Commercial Certificate, if that is possible, would not be able to exercise either one.)

Fear not, however, it does not mean that you no longer have a certificate – just that without the plastic one, you can’t use it. There is an easy way to remedy the problem, which can be done online. Go to the FAA website ([www.faa.gov](http://www.faa.gov)) and click on Licenses & Certificates, and then click on Airmen Certification. In the drop down list that comes down, click on Replace Airmen Certificate and follow the instructions. This can also be done by mail, with the form to do so available on the web site. The cost for the replacement certificate is \$2 (far less than the cost of the infamous “hamburger”) and when the certificate is received you will then be legal to exercise your privileges – provided, of course, that you meet the other required items like a flight review, etc.

It is quite surprising, though not unexpected, that some people who may not have flown for a while will show up for a flight review with a paper certificate. At that point, the flight review should be

terminated and the pilot guided through the process of getting the new certificate. Remember, if they complete a flight review, even under the admonition that they should not fly as PIC until they convert their certificate, if they do so, guess who will be called in next by the FAA? And, for that matter, there is the question of the flight review, during which they are supposedly the PIC (flight training [“dual”] requirement notwithstanding) – so can they even do the flight review without the plastic certificate? We’ll leave that one up to the FAA legal folks.

So, for pilots, DO NOT go flying unless and until you have a plastic pilot certificate in your possession. Otherwise you are not legal. Period.

### **Other Airmen**

All other airmen are now rapidly approaching the deadline when they too will have to have converted their certificates into plastic. This includes flight engineers (what few are left), flight navigators (ditto), mechanics, dispatchers, repairmen, parachute riggers, and ATC tower operators. [See 14CFR Part 63.1 and 14 CFR Part 65.1] These certificates must be converted by **March 31, 2013**, just a few months away at the time of the writing of this article. [See 14CFR Part 63.15(d) and/or 14 CFR Part 65.15(d) for specific expiration wording.]

As with the pilot certificates, there is an easy way to remedy the problem, which can be done online. Go to the FAA website ([www.faa.gov](http://www.faa.gov)) and click on Licenses & Certificates, and then click on Airmen Certification. In the drop down list that comes down, click on Replace Airmen Certificate and follow the instructions. This can also be done by mail, with the form to do so available on the web site. The cost for the replacement certificate is \$2.

Remember, you may not exercise your privileges after the March 31, 2013 date without having a plastic certificate.

### **Some Things to Remember – for Pilots & Mechanics/Repairmen**

First, for the mechanics and repairmen, any signoff after March 31, 2013 of work performed is not a valid signoff because you do not have the right to exercise your certificate. In fact, the work itself is not valid, for the same reason.

Second, while this is fairly obvious, there is an even bigger catch for pilots in regard to maintenance. Remember 14CFR Part 91.3(a)? That is where it states that, “The pilot in command is directly responsible for, and is the final authority as to, the operation of the aircraft.” Then 14CFR Part 91.7(b) states that, “The pilot in command of a civil aircraft is responsible for determining whether that aircraft is in condition for safe flight. The pilot in command shall discontinue the flight when unairworthy mechanical, electrical, or structural conditions occur.” What do we do? We check logbooks before flight – but how often do we check the certificates of the maintenance personnel? Did you know that a pilot can be violated for not checking the certification of the AMT? And, of course, this becomes a more immediate issue on/after 3/31/2013. If it turns out that you are flying an aircraft on which work was done after 3/31/13 and the mechanic who signed it off does not have their “plastic”, the aircraft very well may be “unairworthy”.

Going even a little further, did you know that it is the pilot's responsibility not only to check the logbook but also to check the validity of the signoffs contained therein? When operating under either 14CFR Parts 91, 125, or 135, the form and content of the signoff for return to service is specified in 14 CFR 43.11. The requirements are quite specific, and signoffs are found, often though not frequently, which do not comply when checked by the FAA. Again, who is the final authority as to airworthiness? The pilot in command, who can be held responsible by the FAA for flying an aircraft for which maintenance was not properly signed off.

And, for those of you that like to do aerobatics, or jump out of fully functional aircraft, with a parachute on your back, remember – the certificate requirement also applies to parachute riggers, as of 3/31/13.

### **What ALL Airmen Should Do**

Here is a quick and short list:

- 1) Get your certificate converted to plastic if you have not already done so. (See the instructions previously cited)
- 2) Make sure your airmen friends (regardless of type) know about the plastic requirement.
- 3) Read up on the requirements for the content of logbook entries for return to service following maintenance.
- 4) READ the logbooks for the aircraft you fly – all the time, but especially before taking any rides with the FAA or a representative of the FAA. Failure to do so can be truly embarrassing.
- 5) Make sure, after 3/31/13, that the person making entries in the logbook for the aircraft you fly has their “plastic”.

So, in closing, perhaps the correct form of the question and answer is:

**What makes an airplane fly?**

**Plastic – along with proper logbook entries!**

**And YOU.**

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This article is written by Alan C. Davis – Master Certified Flight Instructor – Emeritus – and is provided to the SAFE Resource Center to be used by other instructors and their students. Alan Davis can be contacted at [rakenjake2@ez2.net](mailto:rakenjake2@ez2.net). 1/20/13