



AIR TRAFFIC PRIORITY

1. Introduction

When the air traffic controller has several aircraft in his area of responsibility, he will decide to give the clearances in a certain order.

This document will help you to understand the group of priorities and why we need them.

2. Categories

According to ICAO, all communication between pilots and air traffic controllers can be categorised into 6 categories of messages depending on the priority of information being transmitted (priority set by order):

1. **DISTRESS**: serious and/or imminent danger, requiring immediate assistance (MAYDAY).
2. **URGENCY**: condition concerning the safety of an aircraft (PAN,PAN or PAN, PAN MEDICAL)
3. **DIRECTION FINDING**
4. **FLIGHT SAFETY**
5. **METEOROLOGICAL**
6. **FLIGHT REGULARITY**

DISTRESS message is the highest priority and **FLIGHT REGULARITY** message is the lowest priority.

3. Description

The DISTRESS and URGENCY messages should be clear for all air traffic controllers (read the relevant documentation to understand the messages and applicable procedures).

The DIRECTION FINDING message should be not applicable for IVAO as they refer to direction-finding stations which are not simulated in the IVAO network. (But for IVAO, in this situation, assistance requested by an aircraft in order to know the bearing toward the airport can be considered to be similar to this type of message.)

The FLIGHT SAFETY messages shall comprise the following:

- Control messages and movement messages
- Messages from other controllers or operating agency (IVAO staff... etc.) with immediate concern to an aircraft in flight
- Meteorological advice of immediate concern to an aircraft in flight or about to depart (aircraft on runway)
- Other messages concerning aircraft in flight or about to depart (aircraft on runway)

The METEOROLOGICAL messages shall comprise all meteorological information to or from aircraft other than the meteorological messages concerned in the FLIGHT SAFETY message.

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The FLIGHT REGULARITY messages shall comprise the following:

- Messages concerning the operation of facilities
- Messages concerning the servicing of aircraft (pushback, de-icing, refuelling)
- Messages concerning aircraft operating schedule (flight clearance delivering, flight plan change)

4. Priority in function of flight rules

In the IVAO network, some air traffic controllers think that instrument flight rule flights (IFR) have priority over visual flight rule flights (VFR).

In the regulations, there is **no rule** stating this.

In real life, the air traffic controller will only facilitate the commercial flight in order to reduce the route length and the delay for landing. For Airline Companies, time is money and one go-around creates extra cost.

In conclusion, the controller will take care of commercial flights before private flights which have less constraints, but give the traffic priority in function of aircrafts' position and performance, but not in function of flight rules as a first criterion.

One go around for an IFR requires a complete new IFR approach in most cases, which can take more than 20min extra flight time.

One go around for a VFR only requires reintegration into the aerodrome circuit which can generate only 5 to 10 minutes extra flight time.

5. Application

The priority of traffic should follow this order:

1. Emergency (distress): when pilot uses MAYDAY message and/or squawk 7700
2. Urgency: when pilot uses PAN or PAN MEDICAL message
3. Bearing: when pilot asks for bearing to station information (example VFR pilot is lost)
4. Flight safety:
 - a. Control message in order to ensure separation
 - b. Control message to aircraft flying in air
 - c. Control message to aircraft on runway
 - d. Control message to aircraft in movement on ground
 - e. Weather information if it has immediate concern to an aircraft in flight (example: thunderstorm forecast, windshear reporting)
5. Meteorological messages: (other than ones considered flight safety related) this could include QNH actualisation, weather report transmission when requested.
6. Flight regularity messages:
 - a. Service provided to an aircraft : Pushback authorization, refuelling and de-icing requests
 - b. Message concerning operating schedule: Flight clearance delivering, flight plan modification...

Pay attention that many beginners in ATC too often give flight clearances and do not care about traffic in flight or moving on the ground which are more important.

In conclusion, a simple formula of priority management for aircraft handling reads:

Emergency >Urgency >Aircraft flying >Runway handling >Taxi ground >Pushback >Flight Clearance

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