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Lifting *the* Curtain

*Meet the People
Behind the Policies
that Affect GA*

Let's say you want to earn a new pilot certificate or rating. You pull out your trusty tablet, open your favorite Federal Aviation Regulations (FAR) /Aeronautical Information Manual (AIM) app (you do have one, right?), and navigate to the appropriate section of Title 14 Code of Federal Regulations (14 CFR part 61). You read through the requirements for eligibility, aeronautical knowledge, and flight proficiency. You note the extent to which the rules permit you to use a flight training device, and you make a note to check the FAA's most recent advisory circular on FAA approval for basic and advanced aviation training devices. While you're in the neighborhood (sort of), you refresh your memory on currency requirements for your current certificate.

As you research this information, you may find yourself wondering who's responsible for all this material? The obvious answer — the FAA — is accurate. Given the focus of this issue, though, I'd like to introduce you to the specific part of the agency and to some of the people whose work can have a direct and all-encompassing impact on our day-to-day lives as pilots.

Meet the General Aviation and Commercial Division of the FAA's Flight Standards Service, known more simply as AFS-800. Aside from medical certification (see the January/February 2013 issue of *FAA Safety Briefing* for more on this topic), AFS-800 is the part of the FAA that has the greatest impact on some of the most basic aspects of airman certification. It is also the organization that houses this publication, so I am particularly partial, — but more on that in a while.



Photo by Tom Hoffmann

The Diversity Division

A former Flight Standards Service director was known for dubbing AFS-800 as the “potpourri division” in view of its everything-except-air-carrier range of responsibilities. Maybe it’s a guy thing, but since potpourri is most definitely not my thing, I prefer to think of my home organization as the “diversity division.” That’s because no other division has a wider portfolio than AFS-800. This division’s wide-ranging responsibilities reflect the breathtaking diversity of GA itself. AFS-800 has the task of developing and disseminating the policies that enable the regions and flight standards district offices to properly oversee such a varied group of stakeholders. AFS-800 is also involved in the creation and maintenance of most of the regulations that impact GA. That responsibility can range from reviewing requests for exemptions to directly writing or rewriting regulations. Any issue regarding the operation (piloting) of a GA aircraft is the business of AFS-800.

Who’s Who

AFS-800 is composed of five branches: Planning and Program Oversight (AFS-805), Airmen Training and Certification (AFS-810), Commercial Operations (AFS-820), General Aviation Operations (AFS-830), and FAA Safety Team (FAASTeam/AFS-850).

The Planning and Program Oversight Branch (AFS-805) functions as the division’s administrative hub. While these functions — budgeting, travel, and personnel — are crucial to the division’s operations, they generally don’t draw much interest from the general public. One notable exception is the publication you’re reading right now: *FAA Safety Briefing* magazine is housed in AFS-805.

The Airman Training and Certification Branch (AFS-810) is very important to almost every GA pilot. “The AFS-810 branch is responsible for airman training and certification standards,” branch manager Jeffery Smith explained. “This includes policy for pilot schools, pilots, flight instructors, and ground instructors. This branch has oversight for most of the content within 14 CFR part 61, almost all of part 141, and is responsible for the associated supporting guidance including handbooks and advisory circulars.” This set of regulations addresses almost every facet of a non-commercial pilot’s aviation life. So whether it concerns the rules under which you certificate or the rules under which you operate, the Aviation Safety Inspectors (ASI) who work in AFS-810 play a role in your life.

AFS-810 also has responsibility for policy on issues like qualification and use of Aviation Training Devices (ATDs), and requirements for Flight Instructor Refresher Courses (FIRC)s. Another area where AFS-810 contributes is in the world of designees. If you’ve taken a check ride (practical test) for an airman certificate or rating in the last few decades, chances are good that you have flown with a Designated Pilot Examiner (DPE). AFS-810 works closely with the Regulatory Support Division (AFS-600 — more below) to set the standards, guidance, and policy for those who conduct practical tests on the FAA’s behalf.

If your work or your passions lead you to fly for compensation, you will be working with policies and regulations managed by the *Commercial Operations Branch* (AFS-820). AFS-820’s purview includes part 91 operations of corporate and turbine aircraft, very light jets, aerial work, fractional ownership (part 91K), large aircraft operations (part 125), rotorcraft external load operations (part 133), agricultural aircraft operations (part 137), public aircraft operations, and unmanned aircraft systems in coordination with other divisions.

“We support a wide spectrum of operations ranging from pleasure flying in privately owned single-engine piston aircraft and very light jets to more complex commercial operations such as agricultural aircraft operations and carriage of sports teams in large turbine aircraft,” said acting manager Everette Rochon. In addition, AFS-820 covers Night Vision Goggle (NVG)/Night Vision Imaging Systems (NVIS) policy, aerial application (colloquially called “crop dusting”) and North America Free Trade Agreement policy. Diverse? Definitely, and that’s not even an exhaustive list!

Next on the list is the *General Aviation Operations Branch* (AFS-830). Need information on launching an amateur rocket or weather balloon? That’s AFS-830. Need to know something about jumping out of an airplane (with a parachute, of course)? That’s AFS-830. Need help understanding how FAA policy applies at an air show? That’s AFS-830. “The AFS-830 Branch has policy and oversight of the personal and ‘fun’ aspects of aviation,” branch manager Tom Glista told us. “This includes airshows and air races; parachuting; ultralights; and operations of light sport, amateur built, and ex-military aircraft,” Glista continued. AFS-830 also is home to programs designed to provide designees for certification in experimental and vintage aircraft where traditional designees are not available.



Photo by Mario Toscano

Last, but certainly not least, is the *FAA Safety Team*, or *FAAS Team Branch* (AFS-850). The FAAS Team is the FAA's most visible tool for safety promotion. The people who staff AFS-850 set the policy and manage the direction and operation of FAAS Team personnel around the country. While your local FAAS Team program manager (FPM) is directly involved in working with pilots at a personal level, AFS-850 exists to provide that FPM with guidance and support. In addition, AFS-850 oversees www.FAASafety.gov, the WINGS Pilot Proficiency program, and development of various safety training materials.

To summarize, here's an easy way to think about how AFS-800 is arranged and what it means to you. First is initial certification and "general training" (AFS-810). Next is flying for compensation or hire in any area except air carrier or air taxi (AFS-820). Third is the very specialized flying that you may or may not get paid to do (AFS-830). There was an AFS-840 branch in previous organizations of AFS-800 so the designation was omitted to prevent internal confusion.

Hand in Hand

By now you can see that the work of AFS-800 significantly affects your life as a pilot. Another division with a significant and related impact is the Regulatory Support Division (AFS-600). As its

formal name implies, AFS-600 supports the regulatory activities and responsibilities assigned to other Flight Standards Service divisions. One key support function is assigned to AFS-605, the *Delegation Management Program*. AFS-605 manages and oversees all Flight Standards designee programs. While policy is directed from AFS-800, the actual implementation is accomplished in AFS-605. Another key office is the *Light Sport Aviation Branch*, AFS-610, which acts as a national field office for issues regarding light sport aviation.

AFS-630, the *Airman Testing Standards Branch*, has a core mission whose function is very well known to most pilots. AFS-630 is responsible for producing and maintaining the practical test standards (PTS), the aeronautical knowledge tests, and a wide range of guidance materials (e.g., the FAA-H series handbooks and the CT-8080 series testing supplements). As we have been reporting in this magazine (see page 15), AFS-600, along with AFS-800 and several other AFS policy divisions, is currently engaged in a major government/industry effort to overhaul the knowledge testing process. Stay tuned for additional developments in this crucial area.

AFS-600 also includes several branches that don't directly deal with the public. These include the *Aviation Data Systems Branch* (AFS-620), the *Designee Standardization Branch* (AFS-640), and the *Designee Quality Assurance Branch* (AFS-650). AFS-620 is responsible for many of the systems that allow the FAA's inspector workforce to do their jobs and for maintaining the Service Difficulty Report System. As you might have guessed from their names, the AFS-640 and AFS-650 branches work hand in hand to create training and standards for FAA's designees and then measure how well the designees meet those standards. ✈️

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Learn More

Every organization has a structure. In the military, that structure is recorded in a document known as the Order of Battle. The Order of Battle lists all of the units in a particular operation and describes their strength, and disposition. For the FAA Flight Standards Service a document called Order AFS 1100.1C (available at <http://go.usa.gov/DVkm>) serves a similar purpose. The 1100.1C Order lists every division in Flight Standards, enumerates the branches that make up each division, and describes the responsibilities and functions of each branch.