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FIRC

A New Look at a Familiar Program

Photo by Tom Hoffmann

Most instructors, as well as other pilots, are familiar with the FIRC acronym. But there are some things you may not know about FIRCs. For instance, not all FIRCs are the same, and FIRC standards have changed in the past year. For the non-instructor, a brief introduction to a topic pertinent to your favorite trainer has benefits for you as well. So, let's just see what is really behind that FIRC acronym.

Let's start with the basic information. FIRC stands for Flight Instructor Refresher Course. The sponsors who provide these courses serve a vital function to aviation through their role in flight instructor certification. Unlike a pilot certificate, the certified flight instructor (CFI) certificate is issued with an expiration date that is typically 24 calendar months after the date of issue. If the certificate is allowed to expire, the only method of reinstatement is successful completion of another CFI practical test. While there may be some who enjoy taking checkrides, it is probably safe to say that most instructors would prefer to retain their CFI privileges without the extra visit to a designated examiner or inspector. Fortunately, a flight instructor can renew his or her CFI certificate anytime within that 24-month period. The methods of renewal are listed in 14 CFR, section 61.197 (a). As you prob-

ably guessed, one of those methods includes the completion of a FIRC.

Once the instructor has completed a FIRC, he or she can submit the course completion certificate, along with a renewal application, to the FAA. Assuming all the necessary boxes are checked, the result is the issuance of a new instructor certificate with a fresh 24-month validity period. There are even provisions for keeping the same expiration month as long as the renewal is done within three months preceding the month of expiration. So, attending the FIRC a little early can take away the fear [insert ominous music] of the dreaded reinstatement checkride without any penalty on the new expiration date.

Enough about the technical aspects of the CFI renewal. What exactly is a FIRC? Some key information appears in the title of the program's governing [Advisory Circular 61-83G, Nationally Scheduled FAA-Approved, Industry Conducted Flight Instructor Refresher Course](#). As the title notes, these courses are intended to be utilized by instructors from any location. They are typically planned in advance, have been given FAA approval, and are conducted by the flight training community. The AC further indicates that "[the] FIRC is intended to keep flight instructors informed of the changing world of General Aviation (GA) flight training, and to enhance

aviation safety through continued refresher training of the flight instructor cadre.”

As you might expect, all FIRC providers must meet certain criteria before the FAA will give its stamp of approval. These include at least 16 hours of course curriculum, testing standards, and a series of required core topics that must be covered by all providers. Despite a certain level of standardization, FIRCs are not all alike. The three main types of FIRCs you will find are in-person, online, and distance learning; each may have an aspect that appeals directly to you.

An in-person FIRC is one that is conducted live with an instructor or series of instructors and presenters. These courses are typically conducted in the classroom setting, often over a two-day weekend (although some may be spread over several weeks). The advantage to this type of FIRC is the personal interaction between the presenters and the FIRC enrollee, as well as discussions among classmates during breaks in the presentations.

An online FIRC is just that: a FIRC delivered through the ones and zeros of the internet. An appeal of the online FIRC is that the course material can be viewed at your own pace and convenience. Also, an online FIRC can be completed from any location where you have an internet connection. With today’s mobile technology, that means that you can have FIRC availability just about anywhere.

Distance learning FIRCs are the third type of program offered. These courses differ from online programs in that internet is not the sole means for the material presentation. Additional methods of communication, either in the form of printed materials, CD-ROMs, or DVDs, or any combination thereof, may be presented to the enrollee. The advantages of being able to progress at your own pace are still there, and the course provider can convey course information through a variety of means.

In addition to the various types of FIRCs, you should note that some providers cater their presentations and elective topics to a particular type of operation. For example, some FIRC providers have courses geared toward rotorcraft or glider aircraft. While these courses will have information that is applicable to all airmen, those operating in these specific categories may especially benefit from the tailored discussion. Further, all FIRC providers have a certain amount of latitude in the topics they elect to present, so you may wish to check with multiple sponsors for an idea on what topics they intend to cover.



Photo by H. Dean Chamberlain

Those who have taken FIRC courses previously may notice a difference between the approved courses of today and those of the past. Many of these changes stem from the update of the aforementioned AC 61-83 from version F to version G. This latest edition, released in the fall of 2011, was the product of industry and FAA collaboration. An easy change to note is the acronym itself, moving from Flight Instructor Refresher Clinic to Flight Instructor Refresher Course. [And anyone who has been around aviation for any length of time knows that changing an acronym is never done frivolously!] This change was made to correspond to the regulations and to convey the concept that FIRCs are indeed professional learning events for those serious about aviation safety. Speaking of professionals, FIRC providers are compelled by the latest AC to interweave concepts of professionalism, ethics, decision making, and safety throughout their entire courseware.

Another notable change from the previous FIRC guidance concerns the required core topics. These subject areas, listed in Appendix A of AC 61-83G, have been designed so the attendee receives the tools necessary to operate in today’s aviation environment. The information offered during the FIRCs can benefit even the most active instructor, so why not consider participating in a FIRC more frequently than the minimum required for renewal? Perhaps a different type of FIRC, or one from another provider, could generate a slightly different perspective on a certain topic. Also, the FIRC can be valuable to pilots of all certificates and skill levels. So when you sign up for your next FIRC, invite some of your students, instructor colleagues, and fellow aviators to do the same!

Now that you have the details behind the acronym, the next step is to find the FIRC that is right for you. ✈️

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