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ICP Flight - Central Flying School

How To Check US NOTAMs

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Baffled by the US NOTAM system? Well, if you're not, you probably should be. Checking US NOTAMS is not as easy as it might seem. It's a somewhat long and complicated process and definitely not user-friendly. But, follow along below and I'll try to give you a systematic approach for checking American NOTAMs so you don't get hurt or violated by your friends at the FAA.

If you have a short attention span, here's the bare bones version of WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

To do a complete NOTAMS check:

1. Get Airfield NOTAMS
2. Get ARTCC NOTAMS to include Temporary Flight Restrictions (TFRs)
3. Get Attention NOTAMS
4. Get FDC NOTAMS
5. Check the Notices to Airmen Publication (NTAP)

It's not really as simple as the 5 easy steps listed above imply.

The US military uses a self-briefing concept for its aviators. Pilots are to access the NOTAM website at <https://www.notams.jcs.mil>. Note that it is an https website and not http. The exact same information and presentation can be found at the FAA's NOTAM website at <https://www.notams.faa.gov>.

Step 1. Get Airfield NOTAMS. This is the one everyone pretty much gets right. When you go to the website, you'll find a text field on the left side and a series of buttons on the right. To get your NOTAMS, enter the airfield, ARTCC, and NAVAID ICAO identifiers for the facilities you want NOTAMS for. When you do this, you'll get one of three responses for each ICAO entered:

1. A list of all active NOTAMs for that facility. This includes all ARTCC NOTAMs for ARTCC identifiers entered, NAVAID NOTAMs for independently entered NAVAIDs, as well as “D” and “L” series NOTAMs for aerodromes;
 - a. Distant (D) NOTAMs – give you critical bits of information that might influence your decision to go there: changes to approaches, runway closures, and other big stuff.
 - b. Local (L) NOTAMs – give you less critical information that will affect you once you arrive: items such as taxiway closures, ground lighting outages, fuel notices, servicing changes, etc. Some aerodromes don’t enter their “L” series NOTAMs into the ICAO NOTAM system thus requiring pilots to call the aerodrome or servicing FSS directly to obtain these NOTAMs.
2. “No active NOTAMs for this location”. This response means that the facility is in the NOTAM system but there are no NOTAMs on file for that facility; or
3. “Location not covered by the US NOTAM System”. In this case, the ICAO identifier is not recognized by the US NOTAM System (which interfaces with the ICAO NOTAM System). Attempt to enter an alternate ICAO identifier for that facility (the IFR Supplement may list up to three ICAO identifiers for some aerodromes).

Step 2. Get ARTCC NOTAMS. Here’s where you’ll find out about MEA changes, NAVAID outages, restricted area activations, altitude reservations in effect, and Temporary Flight Restrictions (TFR). This can be accomplished one of three ways. First, you can simply enter the ICAO identifier for the ARTCC facility (or Flight Information Region (FIR)) in the same text box that you use to check the aerodrome NOTAMs (this method works for any ARTCC facility worldwide). The second way is to click on the “FDC TFR, Special Notices, ARTCC NOTAMS” link on the top of the page and then simply check the box for each U.S. air traffic control center you’ll be transiting. The TFRs are included in the NOTAMS you download. They restrict flight over certain locations and are not printed on any chart. Many of these areas are places where disaster clean-up or fire fighting efforts are underway. Many are government/military facilities and many have been added for national security reasons following the events of Sept 11th. Either way, violating these restrictions might constitute a significant safety risk, possible interception by heavily armed combat aircraft, or the dreaded “Call this number when you land” radio call from ATC. Check them out to avoid trouble. The third method is to simply click on the “ARTCC TFRs” and “FDC, ZZZ Notices” buttons on the opening page. However, be advised that following option three will result in the retrieval of ALL U.S. FDC and TFR Notices which may be a bit overwhelming and certainly more than you need.

HOT TIP: I recommend combining these steps by using the “Flight Path Search” link on the main page. Put in as many waypoints (NAVAIDs) as there’s room for, a buffer range, and what types of NOTAMs you want and it will give you the airfield and enroute NOTAMs, and/or ARTCC NOTAMs, and/or Regulatory Notices for all the fields,

NAVAIDs, and ARTCC facilities enroute (including scores of fields you won't use for divers, but still . . .). A word of warning though, if you're route is long, you may get an overwhelming amount of data back, especially if you select a large buffer range.

Step 3. Get the Attention NOTAMs. These are notices deemed pertinent to operations within certain regions of the globe. There aren't very many typically, and they don't take long to check. Oftentimes, there won't be anything of value, but you never know. Just click the "Attention Notices" button on the NOTAM site's main page or type in the specific designator for the region you want: ATTA for Attention ALL, ATTN for Attention North America, ATTE for Attention Europe, ATTP for Attention Pacific, and ATTC for Attention Central/South America.

Step 4. Get the FDC NOTAMs. These are regulatory changes and advisories that have been issued. They include things like amendments to charts, temporary and combat zone flight restrictions, and certain changes to the FARs. They are long and tedious to read and there is a bucketful of stuff that doesn't apply to you surrounding the one or two nuggets of valuable information. Legally, you must sift through it all and pull out the pertinent information. Just click on the FDC Notices button on the main page to get all the U.S. FDC Notices. You can also click on the "FDC TFR, Special Notices, ARTCC NOTAMs" link on the top of the opening page and then simply check the box for each U.S. air traffic control center you'll be transiting as well as the "Include Regulatory Notices ^(FDC,ZZZ)" checkbox.

Step 5. Check the Notices to Airmen Publication (NTAP). This is a document published (on-line and in paper) every two weeks and contains long term NOTAMs that are scheduled to be in effect beyond the inclusion period of that NTAP. The document contains long term NOTAMs, changes, and general information that all pilots are legally responsible for but are not found anywhere else. You can access the NTAP by clicking on the "Links" link on the top of the main page and then the "Notice To Airmen Part I ^(*)" link on the next page. Even though it just says Part 1, it contains the entire document which has the following 4 sections:

- Part 1 – Airway; Airport/Facilities/Procedural; and General FDC NOTAMs
- Part 2 - Revisions to MEAs and Changeover Points
- Part 3 - International Notices to Airman
- Part 4 - Graphic Notices

All of Part 1 is supposed to be on the DoD NOTAM website. However, more than occasionally, there is important information in the NTAP that doesn't show up on-line. Though mostly redundant, I recommend you always check the NTAP, particularly when you are going to a civil field.

Part 2 is supposed to be on the web too, but there are occasional disconnects where information makes the NTAP, but does not show up under the ARTCC NOTAMs. It doesn't take long to check this section, so I recommend you do it if you're flying airways.

Parts 3 & 4 are not found anywhere else on the website. Graphic Notices are typically procedures in effect for special events like military exercises, sporting events, airshows and the like. Check here to avoid being caught in the middle of a massive VFR arrival flow for some college football game you didn't even know about.

There are several sources to decode NOTAM abbreviations. Try the Flight Information Handbook, the front section of the NTAP, the "7930.2 Notice to Airmen (NOTAMs)" link on the "Links" page, and the FAA Contractions Book, which can be found using the link "Other Air Traffic Publications" on the left side of the NTAP index page.

And, oh yeah, if you're on the phone with FSS (1-800-WX-BRIEF), the briefer won't give you the information contained in the NTAP unless specifically requested. And if you try to call FSS while still in Canada (1-866-WX-BRIEF), the briefer doesn't even have access to the NTAP so don't even bother asking for it.

Still have questions? Contact Capt McGowan at the ICP Flight at AVN 257-6310 or McGowan.KJ@forces.gc.ca.