



# SAFO

Safety Alert for Operators

SAFO 26001

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Flight Standards Service  
Washington, DC

**U.S. Department  
of Transportation**  
**Federal Aviation  
Administration**

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*A SAFO contains important safety information and may include recommended action. Besides the specific action recommended in a SAFO, an alternative action may be as effective in addressing the safety issue named in the SAFO. This is a guidance document. Its content is not legally binding in its own right and will not be relied upon by the Department as a separate basis for affirmative enforcement action or other administrative penalty. Conformity with the guidance document is voluntary only. Nonconformity will not affect rights and obligations under existing statutes and regulations.*

**Subject:** Airspace Management Considerations for Space Launch Activities.

**Purpose:** This SAFO provides information to air carriers, general aviation operators, and flightcrews on the potential impacts of space launch activities, including catastrophic failures resulting in debris fields, and associated airspace management considerations.

**Background:** As commercial and government space launch activities increase, it is imperative that airspace users account for potential disruptions due to launch operations. The Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) Air Traffic Control (ATC) implements airspace restrictions and hazard mitigation measures to protect aircraft from potential hazards due to launch anomalies.

Airspace Management Plans (AMP) depict Temporary Flight Restrictions (TFR), Aircraft Hazard Areas (AHA), and Debris Response Areas (DRA) associated with space launch and/or reentry activities. AHAs segregate air traffic from launch and/or reentry activities, are disseminated via Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) and can also be communicated as a TFR or stationary Altitude Reservation (ALTRV). The FAA issues a NOTAM to activate a DRA in U.S. airspace during unplanned catastrophic events involving falling debris. ATC will reroute aircraft to avoid the area, and maintain clear communication with pilots to ensure safety.

Note: DRAs are not issued in non-radar/oceanic airspace.

In the event of a debris-generating mishap, ATC will issue an alert broadcast to all affected aircraft informing them of the mishap, and, if known, the approximate location of the actual debris fall area. Past events have shown that when a mishap does occur, debris has fallen within or near the DRA, and pilots should exercise extreme caution near these areas.

**Discussion:** Operators should evaluate the impact of space launch and reentry operations on their planned flight routes and take appropriate precautionary measures, including but not limited to:

- Reviewing active Space Launch Potential Danger Area NOTAMs, including AHAs and the associated AMPs, to include the launch schedules during pre-flight planning;

- Attending the Air Traffic Control System Command Center (ATCSCC) Operations Planning Webinar, which advises of the launch, distributes the AMP and discuss any airspace closures or ATC initiatives;
- Identifying and anticipating potential delays and incorporating that information into flight planning;
- Ensuring adequate holding fuel is accounted for and in accordance with Title 14 of the Code of Federal Regulations (14 CFR) Part 121 § 121.647 to accommodate for potential deviations or delays;
- Identifying alternate airports for enroute diversions should a DRA activation occur;
- Considering possible flight cancellations or reroute options, if necessary;
- Recognizing that debris may extend beyond the designated DRA, requiring additional situational awareness. (Currently the DRAs do not extend into procedural oceanic airspace.); and
- Consulting the FAA's Operational Information System (OIS) for real-time updates on air traffic operations, including special airspace restrictions due to space launches. Pilots and operators can check the Current Operations page under the Ops Plan link to stay informed about airspace closures and other relevant notices. <https://www.fly.faa.gov/ois/?legacy=true> go to "Ops Plans" on the menu and select "Current Operations"

**Recommended Action:** Directors of Operations, Chief Pilots, Dispatch, Program Managers, Operational Control Staff, and flightcrews should ensure that the appropriate operator, pilot, and dispatch personnel are advised and trained on the impact of space launch and reentry operations and should take appropriate actions to mitigate the impact, which could significantly reduce safety.

**Contact:** Direct questions or comments regarding this SAFO to the FAA's Air Transportation Division at 9-AFS-200-Correspondence@faa.gov.