

## **Weather Wise (Am I safe and legal to make this VFR flight?)**

1. Watch local trends for a few days prior to planned flight - use TV weather - Weather Channel is a good resource (would the weather today favor a flight, major systems coming into area, get the big picture)
2. Get Outlook Briefing from FSS 6 -24 hours prior to planned flight (1-800 WX BRIEF)  
(same concepts as above - formulate your GO/NO-GO criteria)
3. 1-6 Hours prior to contemplated flight get Standard Briefing from FSS
4. Examine products and information - match to your personal GO/NO-GO criteria (more on this later)

The Standard Briefing has a fixed format:

1. Adverse (hazardous) conditions (Airmets, SIGMETS, Convective Activity, TFRs, Rwy or Airport Closures)
2. "VFR flight not recommended" Statement
3. Synopsis of weather systems
4. Current weather (summarized), including PIREP's
5. Enroute forecast summary
6. Destination forecast (TAF or Area Fcst)
7. Winds aloft forecast
8. NOTAMS
9. Known ATC delays
10. Information (by request only)
  - a. Military Training Routes/MOA's
  - b. Class II NOTAMS (IAPs)
  - c. Other assistance, as required

### **Magic FSS Briefer Words: 'VFR Flight is Not Recommended'**

"When VFR flight is proposed, and sky conditions or visibilities are present or forecast, surface or aloft, that, in the briefer's judgment, would make the flight under Visual Flight Rules doubtful, the briefer will describe the conditions and affected locations and use the phrase 'VFR flight is not recommended.'"

(A.I.M.para. 7-3, b.2)

This recommendation is advisory in nature. It does not remove the pilot's authority to make his/her own decision. "The final decision as to whether the flight can be conducted safely rests solely with the pilot."

(FAR91.3)

Just because a flight can be made legally under VFR, the actual weather may incur additional criteria that would make the flight unsafe. E.g.,

1. Crosswinds excessive to aircraft or pilot's capabilities.
2. Ceiling so low as to make flying close to terrain necessary.
3. Reduced visibility and or low ceiling so as to make checkpoints and terrain obstacles difficult to see.
4. Fronts or other systems moving faster or slower so as to radically modify the actual weather once the flight has begun.

**This is why it is important to set your own personal GO/NO-GO limits.**

GO/NO-GO limits should include, as a minimum:

Minimum ceiling forecast for time of flight

Minimum visibility forecast for time of flight

Maximum winds and crosswind components for runways of intended use.

Freezing levels and temperatures (in summertime excessive temperatures can affect the pilot causing dehydration)

Once the flight has begun you should be monitoring and evaluating conditions along the flight. Do the ceilings match the forecast, is visibility as expected, and un-forecast convective activity, wind direction changes, etc. are all questions you should be evaluating. Need an expert – just a radio call away:

Weather updates during the flight (**Enroute Flight Advisory Service - EFAS - 122.0 MHz**)

EFAS or 'Flight Watch' is available for getting weather updates and filing PIREPs

Contact through a unique call: 'Houston Flight Watch - Diamond 952TS over Lockhart at 3,500'  
While you are really talking with EFAS, they use a series of radio relay stations that communicates back to the FSS. But EFAS is a FSS service provided under aegis of the ARTCC for the area you are in – hence the prefix Houston, or whatever ARTCC region you are in.

Don't use EFAS to file/activate flight plans, get NOTAMs, or anything else not related to weather - instead use the common **FSS frequency of 122.2 MHz**

Finally - File a flight plan and use flight following

VFR flight plan advantages - lost procedures (both if you get lost and fail to arrive)

Flight following advantages - radar advisories ( a controller, if time permitting, is following you and providing traffic advisories); if you are instrument rated, and encounter IMC you can get a 'pop-up' IFR clearance; if student pilot that other voice can just be a calming influence