



Kreckie's FleetChek Advisor *September 2017 / Vol. 1 Edition 7*

FleetChek's Fire Checklist System

FleetChek's electronic checklists provides an electronic, secure, paperless solution, automatic record keeping for Part 139 quarterly fueler inspections, and daily and weekly emergency vehicle inspections (checkouts). This technology is available today in an app.

Airline De-Regulation and its Effect on Fuel Handling

**By,
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Aviation Fueler Inspections

Aviation fuels present the greatest safety risk of fire or explosion at airports. It is stored in large quantities and present in aircraft, vehicles, fuel farms and pipelines. It is very safe when stored and

handled properly, but if not treated with respect can pose serious threats to lives, property and the environment.

On October 24, 1978, President Jimmy Carter signed the "Airline Deregulation Act". The overall intention of deregulation was to remove a layer of government from controlling the airline industry and creating a free competitive market. Prior to deregulation, legacy airlines, like Pan Am, Eastern, Delta, American, Branniff International and TWA conducted all their aircraft and passenger service with employees. Deregulation raised the competitive market and triggered the launching or growth of low cost carriers like Peoples Express, New York Air, Value Jet, Southwest Airlines, and countless others.

In order to offer low cost tickets, the airlines had to create low cost operations. This was a very complicated task. In a move that didn't make sense to the average onlooker, some airlines were buying brand new aircraft to replace the existing fleet. In any other business, the fleet owner would try to keep the current assets as long as possible to avoid the huge capital investment of replacement. The time of deregulation was coincidental to Airbus making a move to increase their share of aircraft in U.S. air carrier fleets. They were offering amazing lease and finance programs to encourage sales. The new jets were considerably more fuel efficient and were in compliance with emerging noise abatement programs.

Deregulation also changed operations on the ramp and in the terminal. Having full time employees dedicated to aircraft fueling or baggage handling no longer presented a cost-effective approach. Union contracts were broken, airlines folded or got eaten up by others. The business was changed forever. New businesses were born to fill the niche, but, in the end, only the strongest survived.



To reduce costs, and to survive, airlines started to contract out everything that they could. In the United States, aviation fueling is now typically conducted by Fixed Based Operators (FBOs), not airline employees. From a business standpoint, this makes perfect sense.

The fuel handlers work for an FBO. The FBO has contracts to fuel aircraft with as many airlines as they can negotiate. The airline is relieved of the costs associated with having full time employees conducting fueling. This reduces their costs and allows them to be more competitive.

The greatest cost of fueling, of course, is the cost of the fuel itself.

FBOs offering fueling services report that the profit margin for providing aircraft fueling services is very small. In their business plans they created a model that offers multiple services to an airline.

They bid to provide aircraft cleaning, maintenance, lavatory service, baggage handling, air freight and passenger services. Their goal is to

be profitable overall. Wages are very low for the entry level FBO employee. An employee fueling passenger aircraft may only be making \$11 or \$12 per hour. They have a very important and difficult job. The weather at airports can be extreme, and the work exhausting. A fueler working for an FBO that shows up late at the gate can be held responsible for causing a delay in pushback. If weather or other issues start affecting the schedule of inbound flights, there is a ripple effect. If the inbound arrives late, there may be no gate available. By the time the aircraft get on the gate, the fuelers and other ramp service personnel are all backed up. The airline wants to turn the aircraft around as quickly as possible because of all the connections affected.

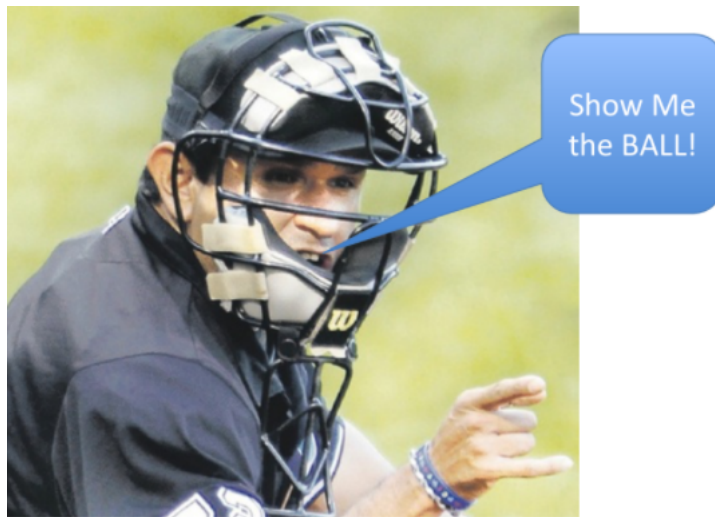
The fuel handlers are obligated to their employer and want to service all the aircraft on their schedule. The original schedule they were given might have had them fueling two aircraft in succession at adjacent gates. Based on delays and actual arrival times, they may need to relocate to the opposite side of the airport for another airline's arriving flight. All these factors result in tremendous pressure on the \$12 per hour ramp worker and causes people to rush. That's when mistakes are made. It is no surprise that there is a very high turnover among aviation fuel handlers.

Fueler Inspections and Safety

As per 14 CFR Part 139, certificated airports are required to inspect the physical facilities of each airport tenant fueling agent at least once every three consecutive months for compliance with § 139.321.

Airport inspectors' records are audited at least annually by FAA Airport Safety Certification Inspectors (ASCIs) to ensure that fuel farms, carts, tankers, fueling stations and cabinets are inspected as per the requirement. These audits are detailed and the ASCI checks assets and dates for each inspection, as well as the records of fire safety training for fuel handler supervisors.

Although not inspected as stringently, Part 139 also requires airport certificate holders to perform reasonable surveillance of all fueling activities. This may be the most important part of the regulation. A surveillance inspection is used to monitor the behavior of the fuel handlers and the fueling process. The fire / safety inspector at an airport has an opportunity to create a safety culture among the fuel handlers. There are a number of ways to do that, including tailgate safety meetings, distribution of fueler safety related informational flyers (in more than one language), and the inspector letting the fueler know who he/she is and what is expected of them. Below is one idea passed on to me by a mentor of mine who managed the fueler inspection program at my airport.



"Show Me the Ball"

Random inspections, also called surveillance inspections, are conducted to evaluate the fueling process, rather than focusing on the fuel handling equipment. These inspections are usually conducted covertly. The inspector takes up a position where a fueling operation can be seen and evaluates critical performance elements. The driver's behavior and adherence with fueling safety requirements are documented. Factors such as vehicle placement, use of chock blocks, proper bonding, proper use of deadman control, and the competence of the fueler are evaluated. Many fuel handlers will never be subject to a random inspection. At a larger airport, they may never see an airport inspector in person. By increasing random inspections and perhaps scheduling "tail gate" safety meetings, fuel handlers may begin to understand the significance of observing safety rules. Defeating the deadman switch is one of the more dangerous potential practices sometimes practiced by fuel handlers. Some become skilled in posing in such a way that it is difficult to see whether they are squeezing the deadman or not. Once a fueling safety culture is established, inspectors patrolling the ramp need only establish a signal to fuel handlers. A tap on the horn or a quick yelp of the siren indicates to fuelers to "show me the ball!" The correct response is to hold up their hand with the deadman switch in their grip.

About the Author:

Jack Kreckie has spent 40 years in fire and emergency services with 35 years in ARFF. Jack is also the founder of FleetChek, LLC, which provides an electronic fueler inspection system. This system uses a native application and handheld tablet device to satisfy the quarterly fueler inspection and recordkeeping requirements of 14 CFR Part 139.321. Jack can be reached at Jack.Kreckie@comcast.net



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