

Pilot Reports - Pilots Helping Other Pilots

When you call and receive a preflight briefing, it's always nice to hear pilot reports. Pilot reports let you know what is happening in the air right now. But where do these reports come from? From pilots, of course! Pilots like you.

So how do you make a pilot report? Well you can just give a shortened version to whatever person you are talking to in ATC, such as NorCal. But the best way to give a pilot report is to call Flight Service (FSS). There are two ways to do this. The first is to call Enroute Flight Advisory Service, EFAS (AKA "Flight Watch"). These folks are a subset of FSS and deal only with weather. They LOVE to copy pilot reports and then put them into the system instantly. You can reach EFAS/Flight Watch anywhere on frequency 122.0. You can also reach Flight Service Stations via the frequencies published on sectional charts. If you see a FSS frequency with a trailing letter "r" (e.g. 122.35r) that means they receive (and therefore you transmit) on the listed frequency but you receive on the nearby VOR. Be sure to press the VOR button on your audio panel to be able to hear them.

Once you contact Flight Watch or a Flight Service Station, what should you include in your pilot report? Just about anything. Visibility, clouds, turbulence, precipitation, winds aloft, or anything else you think would be helpful to other pilots. Be sure to include your tail number, position and altitude. If you're not sure what to say, just ask the specialist what s/he thinks you should report. Making a pilot report is easy.

Making pilot reports will let other folks know what the current conditions truly are rather than just what they are forecast to be. We all know how inaccurate forecasts sometimes are. So next time you are in cruise mode, enjoying the view, be sure to tune in Flight Watch or Flight Service and give a pilot report.

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