

# Return of the Ramp Check

The FAA is coming to your airport, and not to socialize.

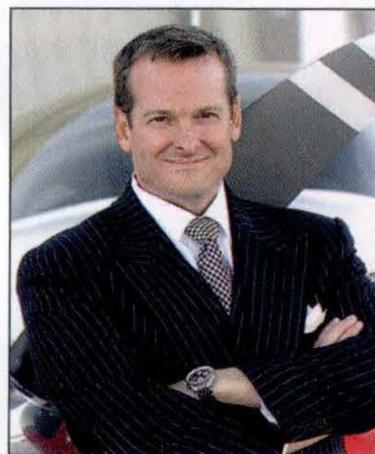
**FOR THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS, THE FAA'S BUDGET SQUEEZE HAS** dictated cutbacks on "non-essential travel" to places like airports, and the relocation of Flight Standards District Offices from pricey on-airport digs to cheaper off-airport office parks.

As a result has been random ramp checks of Part 91 operators became a thing of the past since inspectors didn't want to drive out to the airport for a surprise inspection only to find few, if any, pilots to surprise. Ramp checks for Part 135 and 121 pilots continued, but have become less random.

However, at the beginning of this year, the FAA determined that there is an opportunity for improving aviation safety by getting inspectors back out on ramps and reminding pilots, particularly Part 91 pilots, that the inspectors are out there. Are you ready?

At some point in your flying career, you probably memorized the acronym "ARROW" so as to be ready for an inspector's visit: **A**irworthiness Certificate, **R**egistration Certificate, **R**adio Station License, **O**perator Handbook, **W**eight & Balance. These are the aircraft's required documents, and ARROW is still a pretty good memory jogger, but the required items list has evolved. An aircraft needs an FCC Radio Station License only if flown internationally. And then its pilot also needs to carry a Restricted Radiotelephone Operator Permit.

The ARROW item that you can expect the FAA to carefully scrutinize is your Aircraft Registration Certificate. For decades, these were issued without expiration dates. If the



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registration in your aircraft does not have an expiration date, can go to <http://registry.faa.gov/aircraft-inquiry>, click on "N-Number," enter your registration number and determine when your registration expires. The FAA will mail an expiration notice to the address listed on the certificate. If that address has changed, go to that same website and update the address.

Pilot document requirements have evolved as well: If the inspector asks, "Paper or plastic?" it's not about bagging your groceries. By now all pilots should have replaced their paper airman certificates with plastic versions.

The FAA will also be checking to see if each pilot has "a photo identification that is in that person's physical possession or readily accessible in the aircraft when exercising the privileges of that pilot certificate or authorization." FAR 61.3 lists all of the acceptable forms of ID, and a state-issued driver's license will do nicely.

What are the rules of a ramp inspection? If the inspector forgot to show his or her ID, ask for it. You are required to "present" your airman and medical certificates, so hand them to the inspector, with a smile. The inspector can't run away with your certificates and claim that you "surrendered" them. FAR 61.27 specifically requires that an airman sign a written statement to voluntarily surrender a certificate. The cynical among you may wonder why such a regulation had to be written, but it was, so don't be afraid to hand over your certificates when asked. If the inspector wants to make a copy, ask for the certificates back and tell him that you can get a copy for him at the FBO.

FAA guidance states: "If the surveillance will delay a flight, the inspector should use prudent judgment whether or not to continue." So, as you hand over your certificates, explain your time limitations. Show that you are eager to cooperate, but you don't have time for idle chat. Some corporate operations have developed a Ramp Check Manual that outlines the aircraft documents that are required to be on board, and contains leases and other additional information that may be required. Such manuals give the pilot under pressure a checklist to follow, and at the end of the checklist, the ramp check is over.

Who determines when a ramp check is over? You do. An inspector has no right to detain you. You do not have to speak with an inspector at all. However, if you are a jerk about it, the inspector may begin an investigation, and maybe even find a reason to ground the airplane on the spot. On the other hand, this is not a social engagement.

Don't drag it out. Smile and excuse yourself politely as soon as the inspector has verified that you and the aircraft have the required documents. **BCA**