

REPORTING CHART ERRORS

IFR charts and procedures are drafted by fallible humans. When mistakes happen, it's up to pilots to take notice and speak up.

by Fred Simonds

One of the great things about pilots is that we look after each other. If we spot birds on the runway, someone's fuel cap ajar or recognize something else amiss, we say so. We are all in this together.

Similarly, we have the opportunity to improve system safety by informing the FAA's National Aeronautical Charting Office (NACO) when we discover a charting error. NACO's contact information – by e-mail, telephone or letter, is on every product they publish.

Instrument pilots are additionally asked to suggest changes, additions and recommendations concerning IFR procedures through NACO. If you find a referenced navaid unusable, a difficult turn to make at standard rate, or a flaw in a missed approach procedure, NACO wants to know about it.

Sometimes an error will be in place so long that people get used to it, as in, "Ah, we've known about that one for years." That might be true for local users, but it is a potential trap for visitors and less experienced IFR pilots.

Charting errors are rare, but they do happen. Here in south Florida, the FAA recently commissioned two GPS approaches at Palm Beach County Glades Airport in Pahokee (KPHK). On both plates the ASOS information was incorrect, and on the RNAV (GPS) Rwy 35 approach the runway number near the threshold was stated as "Rwy 17."

None of these three errors is life

threatening in itself, but we all know that accidents are formed in chains and that any one of these could be a link.

Soon after becoming aware of the error, the FAA published an FDC NOTAM stating that these approaches could be performed only with ATC approval. As odd as that sounded, I took it to mean that amendments were in the works.

Not so. The next chart cycle contained the same erroneous charts. This time I crafted an email to NACO detailing the errors. Within a day I received an email acknowledgement and a day after that a phone call from a NACO specialist.

There are two lessons here. First, don't assume that someone else has reported the error you have found. It's better to report it 10 times over than not at all. Second, your report will get attention.

Reports to NACO concerning instrument approaches are logged into a database by the Instrument Approach Procedures Branch (IAPB). The IAPB researches the error and if a NOTAM is required, the corrective action is also entered into the database. An FDC NOTAM is issued within 24 hours, and the chart is scheduled for correction in the next cycle. The customer is also informed of the action taken.

When the staff confirms that the printed chart was indeed corrected, the NOTAM is canceled on the effective date of the revised chart. If somehow the chart did not get corrected, the entire cycle begins anew.

IAPB still follows up with the customer even if a NOTAM is not required, as in the case of an informational inquiry that does not call for chart correction. Equally, minor mistakes such as small typographical errors do not justify a NOTAM. These errors are simply corrected in the next chart cycle.

As we all know, new approach plates are issued every 56 days. In those 56 days, more than 3,000 charts are changed for one reason or another. This is a real attention-getter for those who don't make sure they have current plates. Since you can download current charts for free at naco.faa.gov, why take this risk?

Some of us go by the amendment number in the lower left corner to see that the chart on our kneeboard matches the one in the new book. This is not a bulletproof strategy, though, since details such as frequency changes will not trigger an updated amendment number. Amendment numbers only change when there is a procedural change.

Greg Yamamoto, manager of the IAPB, suggests that users report errors as soon as possible, a process he aptly describes as "scrubbing." Scrubbers include not only the user community but also the FAA Flight Procedures Offices and Flight Standards District Offices.

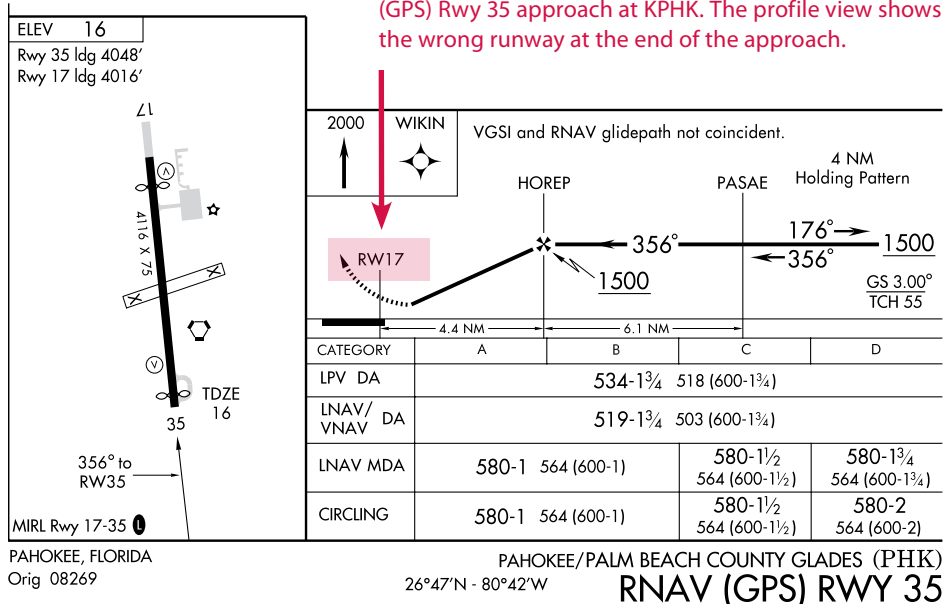
The Visual Chart Branch maintains an equivalent tracking and "scrubbing" process for VFR charts. Voluntary VFR chart feedback is likewise encouraged.

While most of us know about the 56-day cycle for U.S. Terminal Procedures, fewer of us are aware of the Change Notice that comes out 28 days into the cycle. Each notice includes updates to about 225 charts halfway through the cycle.

Change Notices are not as widely seen, as many chart vendors do not carry them. They are supposed to be free with your purchase of a terminal procedures publication, and are includ-

PROCEDURES

!FDC 9/3718 PHK FI/P PALM BEACH COUNTY GLADES, PAHOKEE, FL. RNAV (GPS) RWY 35, ORIG ... CORRECT PROFILE VIEW: CHANGE RWY TEXT TO RWY35 VICE RW17.



ed when you subscribe to NACO procedures online.

Jeppesen Products

Many pilots prefer to use aeronautical charts produced by Jeppesen. Like the government charts, Jeppesen charts are available in both paper and electronic formats.

In addition to some formatting differences, Jeppesen NavData is updated according to an international convention known as the AIRAC cycle, which takes effect on Thursdays every 28 days Zulu time. NavData is the general database that includes waypoints, airports and runway information.

“Most of our charts services update every 14 days and the NavData cycles every 28 days,” said Eric Anderson, spokesperson for Jeppesen. “So if something is corrected it’s generally processed as a revision to a chart or update to the NavData and sent out on the next available cycle. Or it may be covered in a NavData alert or Chart

Change Notice until it can be revised. If the issue is serious we evoke some proactive customer notification steps, but this is rare.”

To report a chart or NavData problem to Jeppesen, pilots or operations personnel initially use their normal customer service channels or call Jeppesen’s Global Support and Control Center in Denver. These initial customer service teams attempt to find out if the reported problem is really a problem or just a misunderstanding on the part of the customer. If the issue does indeed appear to be a legitimate charting error, it is escalated to a “Tier 2” team.

The Tier 2 team member discusses the situation with the customer, gathers all available background and determines if further action is required. In 70 percent of the cases no correction is warranted, Anderson said. “The issue is often resolved with education about a particular piece of avionics or an understanding of Jeppesen charts

and/or NavData.” If corrective action is required then the issue is researched and a plan for correcting all affected products is established with the production teams. Finally, the Tier 2 member follows up with the customer to report the corrective action taken and ensure that all of the customer’s needs have been met.

Jeppesen’s Tier 2 support team is made up of highly skilled chart and NavData experts, Anderson said, with team members averaging 17.5 years at Jeppesen. The most senior person at Jeppesen works in Tier 2 support—he started with the company in 1956.

Obtaining Change Notices

Pilots can download instrument procedure change notices for NACO charts at naco.faa.gov, and for Jeppesen products at www.jeppesen.com/company/alerts/alerts.jsp. Doing this helps pilots meet FAR 91.103, “Preflight Actions,” which calls the pilot in command to become familiar before the flight with all available information concerning that flight.

For myself, I took some small satisfaction in reporting these little errors. However small, I made a difference, and you can, too.

Fred Simonds is a Gold Seal CFII and factory-certified G1000 instructor. See his web page at www.fredonflying.com.

AUDIO SERIES

IFR REFRESHER

A Chart Is Born

Ever wonder how instrument approach procedures are produced, updated and distributed? Then check out our new audio series. This month we’ll speak with Eric Anderson, spokesperson for Jeppesen, which has delivered such products for 70 years. To hear this audio series, log onto our sister publication, www.avweb.com, and click the Podcast button in the upper right corner of the home page.

