

It's time to phase out the TFR zone around the Washington, DC area. The restriction was appropriate in the weeks and months after 9/11/2001, but general aviation has shown itself to be much less of a risk than our government's security agencies had feared.

As a pilot and owner of a small airplane based at Montgomery County Airpark, MD (GAI), I am faced with the TFR restrictions on almost every flight. We used to be able to fly south through a VFR corridor between Reagan National and Dulles airports, but that has been closed by the TFR; now we either fly east through a narrow VFR corridor almost to Annapolis, or fly a wide arc west around Dulles. (On IFR, the detours are even farther out of the way.) The loss of that north-south corridor is a recurring problem for me.

But the greater hardship of lost business at the "DC Three" airports (College Park, Potomac and Hyde) threatens their very existence AS airports. Without flight training and visiting aircraft, these airports have lost about 6/7ths of their revenue over the past year -- and unlike the airlines, they aren't getting a penny of support from the Federal government. College Park has about one-third as many airplanes as had been based there before 9/11.

GA has been under tight scrutiny for the past sixteen months, not only from the FAA but from the DoD, the DoT, the TSA, the FBI, the Secret Service and the National Security Council. These organizations have seen that GA aircraft do not pose a significant terrorist threat to the USA. In fact, a couple of tragic examples have shown the world that a suicide crash of a light plane into an office building did little damage. Besides that, the GA community has tightened up its own security, with measures such as the Airport Watch program and more-restricted access to the flight line.

SFAR 94 did its job while we needed it, but honestly, hasn't it run its course? At the very least, it should be relaxed enough so that pilots in the region could get "vetted" and then use the "DC Three" airports and fly through the north-south corridor between Reagan National and Dulles. Unless the national-security community sees a clear and definite risk from light aircraft, we would do well to ease off or eliminate the SFAR 94 restrictions.