Section 5. Pilot/Controller Roles and Responsibilities

5−5−1. General

a. The roles and responsibilities of the pilot and controller for effective participation in the ATC system are contained in several documents. Pilot responsibilities are in the CFRs and the air traffic controllers' are in the FAA Order JO 7110.65, Air Traffic Control, and supplemental FAA directives. Additional and supplemental information for pilots can be found in the current Aeronautical Information Manual (AIM), Notices to Airmen, Advisory Circulars and aeronautical charts. Since there are many other excellent publications produced by nongovernment organizations, as well as other government organizations, with various updating cycles, questions concerning the latest or most current material can be resolved by cross-checking with the above mentioned documents.

b. The pilot−in−command of an aircraft is directly responsible for, and is the final authority as to the safe operation of that aircraft. In an emergency requiring immediate action, the pilot−in−command may deviate from any rule in the General Subpart A and Flight Rules Subpart B in accordance with 14 CFR Section 91.3.

c. The air traffic controller is responsible to give first priority to the separation of aircraft and to the issuance of radar safety alerts, second priority to other services that are required, but do not involve separation of aircraft and third priority to additional services to the extent possible.

d. In order to maintain a safe and efficient air traffic system, it is necessary that each party fulfill their responsibilities to the fullest.

e. The responsibilities of the pilot and the controller intentionally overlap in many areas providing a degree of redundancy. Should one or the other fail in any manner, this overlapping responsibility is expected to compensate, in many cases, for failures that may affect safety.

f. The following, while not intended to be all inclusive, is a brief listing of pilot and controller responsibilities for some commonly used procedures or phases of flight. More detailed explanations are contained in other portions of this publication, the appropriate CFRs, ACs and similar publications. The information provided is an overview of the principles involved and is not meant as an interpretation of the rules nor is it intended to extend or diminish responsibilities.

5−5−2. Air Traffic Clearance

a. Pilot.

1. Acknowledges receipt and understanding of an ATC clearance.

2. Reads back any hold short of runway instructions issued by ATC.

3. Requests clarification or amendment, as appropriate, any time a clearance is not fully understood or considered unacceptable from a safety standpoint.

4. Promptly complies with an air traffic clearance upon receipt except as necessary to cope with an emergency. Advises ATC as soon as possible and obtains an amended clearance, if deviation is necessary.

NOTE−
A clearance to land means that appropriate separation on the landing runway will be ensured. A landing clearance does not relieve the pilot from compliance with any previously issued altitude crossing restriction.

b. Controller.

1. Issues appropriate clearances for the operation to be conducted, or being conducted, in accordance with established criteria.

2. Assigns altitudes in IFR clearances that are at or above the minimum IFR altitudes in controlled airspace.

3. Ensures acknowledgement by the pilot for issued information, clearances, or instructions.

4. Ensures that readbacks by the pilot of altitude, heading, or other items are correct. If incorrect, distorted, or incomplete, makes corrections as appropriate.