§ 11.103 What exemption relief may be available to federal, state, and local governments when operating aircraft that are not public aircraft?

The Federal Aviation Administration may grant a federal, state, or local government an exemption from part A of subtitle VII of title 49 United States Code, and any regulation issued under that authority that is applicable to an aircraft as a result of the Independent Safety Board Act Amendments of 1994, Public Law 103–411, if—

(a) The Administrator finds that granting the exemption is necessary to prevent an undue economic burden on the unit of government; and

(b) The Administrator certifies that the aviation safety program of the unit of government is effective and appropriate to ensure safe operations of the type of aircraft operated by the unit of government.

[68 FR 25488, May 13, 2003]
and someone outside the government regarding a specific rulemaking proceeding, before that proceeding closes. A rulemaking proceeding does not close until we publish the final rule or withdraw the NPRM. Because an ex parte contact excludes other interested persons, including the rest of the public, from the communication, it may give an unfair advantage to one party, or appear to do so.

2. Are written comments to the docket ex parte contacts?

Written comments submitted to the docket are not ex parte contacts because they are available for inspection by all members of the public.

3. What is DOT policy on ex parte contacts?

It is DOT policy to provide for open development of rules and to encourage full public participation in rulemaking actions. In addition to providing opportunity to respond in writing to an NPRM and to appear and be heard at a hearing, DOT policy encourages agencies to contact the public directly when we need factual information to resolve questions of substance. It also encourages DOT agencies to be receptive to appropriate contacts from persons affected by or interested in a proposed action. But under some circumstances an ex parte contact could affect the basic openness and fairness of the rulemaking process. Even the appearance of impropriety can affect public confidence in the process. For this reason, DOT policy sets careful guidelines for these contacts. The kind of ex parte contacts permitted and the procedures we follow depend on when the contact occurs in the rulemaking process.

4. What kinds of ex parte contacts does DOT policy permit before we issue an ANPRM, NPRM, Supplemental NPRM, or immediately adopted final rule?

The DOT policy authorizes ex parte contacts that we need to obtain technical and economic information. We need this information to decide whether to issue a regulation and what it should say. Each contact that influences our development of the regulation is noted in the preamble. For multiple contacts that are similar, we may provide only a general discussion. For contacts not discussed in the preamble, we place a report discussing each contact or group of related contacts in the rulemaking docket when it is opened.

5. Does DOT policy permit ex parte contacts during the comment period?

No, during the comment period, the public docket is available for written comments from any member of the public. These comments can be examined and responded to by any interested person. Because this public forum is available, DOT policy discourages ex parte contacts during the comment period. They are not necessary to collect the information the agency needs to make its decision.

6. What if the FAA believes it needs to meet with members of the public to discuss the proposal?

If the FAA determines that it would be helpful to invite members of the public to make oral presentations to it regarding the proposal, we will announce a public meeting in the Federal Register.

7. Are any oral contacts concerning the proposal permitted during the comment period?

If you contact the agency with questions regarding the proposal during the comment period, we can only provide you with information that has already been made available to the general public. If you contact the agency to discuss the proposal, you will be told that the proper avenue of communication during the comment period is a written communication to the docket.

8. If a substantive ex parte contact does occur during the comment period, what does FAA do?

While FAA tries to ensure that FAA personnel and the public are aware of DOT policy, substantive ex parte contacts do occasionally occur, for example, at meetings not intended for that purpose. In such a case, we place a summary of the contact and a copy of any materials provided at the meeting in the rulemaking docket. We encourage participants in such a meeting to file written comments in the docket.

9. Does DOT policy permit ex parte contacts the comment period has closed?

DOT policy strongly discourages ex parte contacts initiated by commenters to discuss their position on the proposal once the comment period has closed. Such a contact at this time would be improper, since other interested persons would not have an opportunity to respond. If we need further information regarding a comment in the docket, we may request this from a commenter. A record of this contact and the information provided is placed in the docket. If we need to make other contacts to update factual information, such as economic data, we will disclose this information in the final rule docket or in the economic studies accompanying it, which are available in the docket.

10. What if FAA needs to meet with interested persons to discuss the proposal after the comment period has closed?

If FAA determines that it would be helpful to meet with a person or group after the close of the comment period to discuss a
course of action to be taken, we will announce the meeting in the Federal Register. We will also consider reopening
the comment period. If an inappropriate ex parte contact does occur after the comment period closes, a summary of the contact and a copy of any material distributed during meeting will be placed in the docket if it could be seen as influencing the rulemaking process.

11. Under what circumstances will FAA reopen the comment period?

If we receive an ex parte communication after the comment period has closed that could substantially influence the
rulemaking, we may reopen the comment period. DOT policy requires the agency to carefully consider whether the substance of the contact will give the commenter an unfair advantage, since the rest of the public may not see the record of the contact in the docket. When the substance of a proposed rule is significantly changed as a result of such an oral communication, DOT policy and practice requires that the comment period be reopened by issuing a supplemental NPRM in which the reasons for the change are discussed.

12. What if I have important information for FAA and the comment period is closed?

You may always provide FAA with written information after the close of the comment period and it will be considered if time permits. Because contacts after the close of the comment may not be seen by other interested persons, if they substantially and specifically influence the FAA’s decision, we may need to reopen the comment period.

PART 13—INVESTIGATIVE AND ENFORCEMENT PROCEDURES

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