

Introduction

Civil aviation aircraft capable of flying from 500 to 1,300 miles without being refueled provide one of the most successful and surreptitious means of moving illicit drugs, weapons, currency or undocumented aliens domestically or internationally. Due to their relatively small size and versatility, the aircraft can be very difficult for law enforcement personnel to detect, follow, locate or interdict. The aircraft can land at any airport, remote area landing strip or bodies of water. Traffickers can easily maintain security and secrecy of clandestine movements. Trafficking by aircraft is not limited to border or coastal regions; it can and does occur between States and provinces throughout North America.

Because small aircraft spend most of the time on the ground, this occasion provides one of the best opportunities to determine if it may be involved in illicit activities.

Purpose

This pamphlet is provided to assist patrol and narcotics officers to identify and detect aircraft-related contraband and alien trafficking and provides some, but not all, common indicators. It also provides points of contact at EPIC and CBP AMOC for information and reporting (listed on last page).

Aircraft Indicators

EXTERIOR

- Drug-detecting canines alert on the aircraft.
- Propellers may be bent or nicked and have scratches or chips in painted surfaces. Field expedient or makeshift repairs may be obvious.
- Windows are covered or have tape residue.
- The aircraft has warped doorframes (indicating the aircraft has been flown with the doors open).



- Dirt or vegetation may be stuck in wheel wells, flaps and nacelles on aircraft that have landed at clandestine airstrips.
- Aircraft may be covered with sea spray from flying low over bodies of water. (This also includes helicopters used for transfers at sea.)
- Temporary or makeshift (field expedient) repairs may have been made to the landing gear, fuselage or wings because of damage sustained from landing at clandestine airstrips.
- Aircraft may be equipped with oversize wheels (wheel covers removed to accommodate them) and extended or overinflated landing struts, indicating that heavy loads are being transported or the aircraft landed at clandestine airstrips.
- Aircraft are modified with short takeoff and landing (STOL) kits, such as oversized flaps, reinforced struts, oversized tires and wingtip kits (curved 1 to 2 inches).
- Aircraft type, size or number of radio antennas are not compatible with the work or needs of the owner.
- High-security locks are used on civil aviation aircraft (Medeco® is one brand).
- Doors open inward or are hinged at the top (to accommodate airdrops).
- There may be evidence of masked or obscured tail numbers ("N" numbers for the United States), tape residue on or near tail numbers or signs that the tail numbers poorly contrast with the body paint.
- Numbers do not match on both sides or numbers indicate recent and repeated repainting, while the rest of the aircraft does not.
- Required aircraft data plates and Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) registrations do not match type, model and/or serial numbers on suspect plane.

INTERIOR

- The aircraft hauls low-density, bulky cargo, duffel bags or crudely taped packages.
- The rear or passenger seats are missing.
- Electronics and navigation aids are not consistent with aircraft use or size, including CB or handheld radios, mobile telephones, automobile-style radar detectors, police scanners, battery-operated strobe lights and/or night-vision goggles (NVGs).
- Fuel tanks, portable canisters, pumping equipment in the cabin area or fuel system modifications without the required FAA Form 337 present have been added.
- An odor of drugs, chemicals, strong perfume or fuel can be detected in and around the plane.
- Luggage types and amounts are inconsistent with passengers' or crews' needs.

Other Suspect Indicators

- There is evidence of substandard fuel being used in the plane. (Mexican gasoline has a sulfur odor. Automobile fuel may be substituted for blue-tinted aviation fuel—100 octane low lead. Aviation fuel noted in one tank with automobile fuel in the other may indicate refueling occurred in a foreign country—aviation fuel is controlled in some countries.)
- The aircraft arrives from abroad without Customs or Immigration clearance reports or forms.
- The aircraft contains items from source or transshipment areas (newspapers, food wrappers, maps or clandestine landing field coordinates).
- The aircraft is on record with the El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC) or CBP AMOC or is shown in the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) as stolen.

Airfield Indicators

- Aircraft was purchased or leased from a suspect individual or company.
- Suspicious persons loitering for no apparent reason.
- Drug-detecting canines alert on hangars and cars parked at the airport.
- Aviation fuel is pumped into barrels carried in trucks or trailers.
- There are reports of an increase in aircraft that arrive from high drug-trafficking areas (Note: Copies of fuel receipts may contain useful information).
- A suspect business operates at or near the airport.
- Refueling equipment is stored at hangars.
- Large amounts of chemicals are found at hangars.
- There are reports of short-term hangar rentals by out-of-town persons who often pay with cash and list a P.O. box as an address.
- Aircraft arrive and depart after airport closes, but particularly during times of darkness.
- Individuals wait along the landing path of the airport (to receive airdrops).
- Individuals in vehicles meet the aircraft and quickly offload the plane and depart quickly.



Enrique Camarena-Salazar Building

Suspect Pilot Indicators

- Pilots have repairs performed without regard to cost and pay cash.
- Pilot does not have a valid pilot's license.
- Aircrew lingers near the aircraft; act anxious, are evasive; may park in remote areas of the airport; have mixed stories and insist on performing ground tasks on their aircraft.
- Persons who are known or suspected drug or human traffickers either associate with the aircrew or perform aircrew tasks.
- Aircraft is rented to a suspect individual and reported usage is not consistent with documentation or statements made to the owner. Required receipts are often lost.
- Aircrew have exotic or an unusual number of weapons aboard, often pay cash, and have IDs without photographs.
- Business travelers or pilots do not ask for nor keep receipts.
- Aircrew does not have charts for the routes flown and have not filed flight plans, but have coded notes, maps of drug source or transshipment areas.

Remote Area Indicators

- **Clandestine airstrips/airdrop zones:** Activities such as marking the airstrip or drop zone near the aircraft's arrival time normally occur at first or last light. Activities usually occur in remote areas, roads, forest meadows, bodies of water, snowfields, or on closed abandoned airstrips. Offload vehicles have access to the airstrip.
- A straight strip of rural road with recent/unexplained improvements, such as packed or trimmed vegetation; widened, graded, or filled pot holes, which could indicate where an aircraft might land, turn around, and take off.
- A pole or fence with a makeshift windsock on it.
- Aircraft flying low or circling without lights.
- Persons or vehicles with suspect markings and lighting devices, including portable lighting, police scanners, two-way radios, satellite telephones, road flares, brightly colored tarps, chem-lights or NVGs.

- Cans or barrels with rags and fuel arranged in a pattern or along the edges of landing and drop areas.
- Crop-dusting aircraft flying out of season or not engaged in dusting activities.
- Aircraft or landing gear skid marks located on roads.
- Vehicle activity on property not related to ATV or "off-road" enthusiast use.
- Vehicle tracks found adjacent to aircraft tracks.
- Concealed fuel barrels and refueling equipment found in a remote area.
- Strobe lights or chem-lights found in remote locations (these are used to locate airdropped material in the dark, in water, or in heavy brush).
- Persons acting as spotters or lookouts.
- Access roads are unusually blocked or have vehicle tire-immobilizing devices deployed.

In addition to these suspect activity indicators, airport owners and workers, the Civil Air Patrol, real estate agents, flying clubs, aviation mechanics, fuel dealers, car rental firms and related businesses may serve as additional sources of suspect information. Often, success has resulted from asking local service providers about their suspicions and provide a business card with contact information.

EPIC Points of Contact

► Law enforcement officers who contact EPIC concerning any and all suspect aircraft activity receive both general and specific investigative information and could learn of related cases or activities. When authorized, EPIC can provide specific case assistance and information, such as placing aircraft on "lookout" for Federal and State and local law enforcement agencies; provide flight-tracking services and points-of-contact for related cases; provide flight plans, arrival and passenger information.

► **To request EPIC access, go to:** <https://www.esp.gov/portal> on the internet.

► Note: All Federal Agents, State, local or tribal police and sheriff's officers must have established access to request EPIC services.

► To report any suspect aircraft activity (with or without identifying information), including aircraft, pilots, thefts, etc., call the El Paso Intelligence Center's 24-hour Watch Operations Section at 1-888-USE-EPIC (1-888-873-3742). If a record exists, the reporting officer will be advised of the previous report.

► Suspect offloads or airdrops should be reported to the CBP Air Marine Operations Center (AMOC) at 1-866-247-2878.

► **Non-time sensitive** queries or detailed reporting can be sent by email to the EPIC Air Investigations Group at: epic.airwatch@usdoj.gov.

EPIC NUMBERS:

Watch Operations Section	1-888-USE-EPIC 1-888-873-3742
Air Investigations Group	1-915-760-2326 1-915-760-2253
EPIC Main Line	1-915-760-2000
CBP AMOC	1-866-247-2878

Quick Reference

RAMP CHECK:

When conducting a ramp check, all pilots **MUST** provide any law enforcement officer the following documents upon demand, as mandated in 14 CFR 61.3 or 61.51:

- 1- Pilot's Certificate/License (AC Form 8060-2).
- 2- Current Medical Certificate (FAA Form 8420-2).
- 3- Aircraft Registration (AC Form 8050-3) or 8050-1 temporary 90-day registration aka "pink slip".
- 4- Aircraft Airworthiness Certificate (Form 8200-2).
- 5- If major modifications have been made to the fuel system, an FAA Form-337 must be with the aircraft.

For copies of up-to-date Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) documents, certificates and additional material, Law Enforcement Officials can contact, for law enforcement purposes only, the FAA Law Enforcement Assistance Unit at email 9-AMC-700-LEAU@FAA.GOV, at 405-954-3784 (unlisted), or fax 405-954-4989.



A
Police
Officer's
Guide to
Detecting
Illicit
Trafficking
by Aircraft