

What To Tell ATC...And When

In any situation involving an equipment failure under IFR, your first concern should not be what to tell ATC and when. Instead, you should be concerned about flying the airplane and ensuring you're doing everything necessary to maintain control. Everything—and we mean everything—else can wait until you're assured the airplane is where you want it and you can devote time and attention to lesser tasks.

The text box at right reproduces FAR 91.187, "Operation under IFR in controlled airspace: Malfunction reports." It's pretty simple and should be easy to comply with. The only catches, if you could call them that, are which conditions constitute a failure and remembering what equipment is used for navigation, approaches or communications.

For example, if your moving map fails, it shouldn't materially affect your ability to navigate/communicate or shoot an approach. Similarly, an MFD failure might take out your terrain and traffic alerting system, or your datalinked Nexrad, but doesn't affect your ability to get from Point A to Point B. We'd say such a failure isn't reportable.

Meanwhile, let's say you've got an old-school panel, and your ADF or DME goes offline. Either potentially could affect your ability to shoot an approach, depending on where you're going and the procedures available. Reporting such is a judgment call, and we'd generally err on the side of caution when it comes to complying with the FARs. Still, when was the last time you actually shot an NDB approach, or depended on DME to identify a step-down fix?

As for failing to report, we've never heard of anyone getting violated for not telling ATC about such a failure under IFR. The regulation is more of a reminder than anything else. Of course, by definition you can't report a complete communications failure, can you? Just to be safe, file an ASRS report once you're on the ground after your next one.

91.187 Operation under IFR in controlled airspace: Malfunction reports.

(a) The pilot in command of each aircraft operated in controlled airspace under IFR shall report as soon as practical to ATC any malfunctions of navigational, approach, or communication equipment occurring in flight.

(b) In each report required by paragraph (a) of this section, the pilot in command shall include the—

- (1) Aircraft identification;
- (2) Equipment affected;
- (3) Degree to which the capability of the pilot to operate under IFR in the ATC system is impaired; and
- (4) Nature and extent of assistance desired from ATC.