

EAVESDROPPING ON ATC: IT'S NOT ONLY ALLOWED, IT'S ENCOURAGED

No flight following for you? But not interested in filing IFR for whatever reason? You can do what this writer and your editor-in-chief did last summer on a VFR leg between Clark County Regional Airport (JVY) in southern Indiana and a little Wisconsin airport in Oshkosh—eavesdrop on the controllers.

Our direct track took us through the Class Bravo airspace at Indianapolis and Chicago—but we took an altitude that kept us clear of them and free from mandatory contact requirements. After starting off with VFR flight following, workload caused Chicago Approach to drop us.

No worries, as we continued to jump to the next appropriate frequency as we cruised northwest-bound. And when we got to Milwaukee's Class C airspace they slid us right back into the system for the rest of the ride. So we knew there was traffic ahead of us as we descended to pattern altitude over Lake Winnebago.

Going back to JVY a few days later, the story was somewhat different. We'd get in the system for a sector, get dropped and make a renewed request to the next...get accepted, get dropped. And we had no flight following as we cruised south-southeast past Chicago's lakefront.

We still heard and saw all potential conflicts along the way—because the controllers were calling us out *as* traffic. (There's something cool about cruising a couple miles east of Lakeshore Drive over Lake Michigan while watching arrivals flowing underneath you toward Midway and O'Hare.)

One benefit of trying, even when you've heard the controllers shoot down others, is letting them identify the blip as the correct aircraft.

That is, "Chicago Approach, Skysmasher 12345 is 20 east of Midway at eleven thousand five hundred, southbound, requesting flight following..." Even if the controller responds with regrets, chances are if you present a potential traffic conflict for someone being handled, he or she now will know who and what you are, and be able give other pilots something more specific than type unknown and altitude unconfirmed.

