

Offsets in En-Route Airspace

In recent weeks IFALPA has been made aware of NOTAMs being issued that instruct aircraft to fly offsets to a number of routes, between specific waypoints. These include M503 where aircraft are instructed to establish a lateral offset of 6nm to the West of the airway, and N644 where aircraft are instructed to establish a lateral offset of 10nm to the East of the airway. It is important to note that these are not offsets for the purposes of Strategic Lateral Offset Procedures (SLOP).

Besides SLOP, lateral offsets can provide an additional safety margin and mitigate the risk of traffic conflict due to altitude deviations from wake or other turbulence. Offsets in en-route airspace can also be used tactically by ATC for a variety of reasons, and Controller to Pilot communications are the normal method for initiating the maneuver. In this case the pilot has the opportunity to respond that they are unable to do this if required. If the aircraft is not equipped to operate a lateral offset, or for some reason the aircraft loses this capability, ATC must be informed immediately.

IFALPA is seeking further clarification from ICAO on the two NOTAMs mentioned, but until this is achieved, crews should ensure that en-route NOTAMs are carefully reviewed and should verify these instructions with ATC.

IFALPA is opposed to the unprecedented practice of instructing aircraft to conduct lateral offsets via NOTAM as it has the potential to cause serious navigational errors and/or loss of separation.