

## Similar Call Signs

The increase in radiotelephony (RT) procedures has led to the large scale use of **numbers** for both the contents of messages and identification of flights. This in turn has been the cause of many ATC incidents and misidentification of flights. Call sign confusion by pilots or controllers has caused several near misses and at least one accident involving aircraft damage and serious personal injury.

The usage of similar call signs containing numbers as flight identifiers has only amplified this problem. The possibility of “call sign confusion” is mainly associated with flights of one operator using similar-sounding flight numbers (e.g. AB120 and AB126) or different airlines using the same or similar sounding numbers (e.g. AB120 and YZ120).

One countermeasure to avoid this is to change similar flight numbers of flights taking place at roughly the same time to eliminate and/or reduce to an absolute minimum, the chance of having two (or more) aircraft with phonetically similar call signs on the same radio frequency at the same time.

EUROCONTROL have recommended alphanumeric call signs for many years. They have an article in their SKYbrary: [http://www.skybrary.aero/index.php/Call-sign\\_Confusion](http://www.skybrary.aero/index.php/Call-sign_Confusion).

There have been many studies, although not directly addressing numeric against alphanumeric call signs. The recommendation comes both from practical experience and from a pure analytical reasoning that adding elements with more possible states (not from 0 to 9 but from A to Z) will, based on simple mathematical combinations, give more solution space to find dissimilar call signs before flight and result in less likelihood of two similar call signs in critical proximity in flight.

IFALPA believes that in order to avoid confusion operators should be encouraged to use alpha-numerical flight identifications. Using Call Sign Similarity software tools, these should be coordinated in advance on a regional and preferably global scale to avoid any possible overlap. These alpha-numeric call signs should not be complicated to pronounce and limited to a maximum of three characters.

Alpha-numeric flight identifiers should be coordinated and assigned to flights in the planning stage and not to aircraft in flight.