

St. Louis Training Prepares Managers for Major Changes

Updated: 8:43 am ET June 26, 2007

August 23 – The message out of St. Louis: managers must be ready for what is going to be a major change under the new air traffic controller contract.

“It’s going to be a big change out there,” Rick Ducharme, ATO lead negotiator for the controller contract, said at the first full day of contract implementation training yesterday. “People are going to be nervous.”



Ducharme explains the contract to ATO managers. Photo: FAA

To help prepare air traffic organization managers, FAA leaders are gathering in St. Louis to make sure everyone is ready for the transition next month. There are 110 articles in the new contract, which was implemented after the FAA and NATCA were unable to come to a voluntary agreement.

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“It’s pretty impressive that the agency would invest the time and dollars to put on this kind of training,” said Andi Ramaker, manager of Quality Assurance for the Central En Route and Oceanic Service Area. “If we do this right, if we are fair in the implementation of this contract, about 95 percent of the workforce is going to be happy. It is a huge opportunity for us.”

Yesterday’s session in St. Louis focused on how to implement the new work rules fairly, consistently and professionally. The FAA will use the three weeks before the new work rules go into effect on Sept. 3, 2006, to make sure air traffic managers are prepared to operate under the new contract.

“We want you to implement this contract clearly, consistently and fairly,” FAA Administrator Marion Blakey told a packed room of 1,000 managers in St. Louis. “As managers, we are counting on you. I hope you know you can count on us.”

WARNING!! Scary Photo next page!!



FAA Administrator Marion Blakey. Photo: FAA

Although both parties came to an impasse, under the law that governs FAA workforce negotiations, the contract can still be implemented. According to the law, if the negotiating parties reach an impasse, the FAA can send its offer to Congress, which then has 60 days to act. If Congress does not act within 60 days, the agency can implement its last and best offer. The FAA was given the green light to move forward after the House of Representatives rejected a measure that would have barred its implementation. After 60 days, on June 5, the FAA announced that it would implement its last and best offer.

“It would have been great to have a voluntary deal,” acknowledged Blakey. “But in the end our positions were too far apart and Congress, after all, told us we had to get our costs under control. Now we can look them straight in the face and say that we are.”

However, Blakey also made it very clear that her interest in moving forward was to find common ground and “create a supportive environment for everyone this contract touches.” She noted her recent meeting with new NATCA President Pat Forrey, and said she was looking forward to a new era of professionalism.

Before the FAA moves forward with any of the new work rules, the agency wants to make sure managers understand the terms of the contract.

Ducharme walked through the contract articles with attendees, highlighting the major changes under the new terms.

One of those articles is Article 17, “Position Descriptions,” which describes the additional duties controllers will perform if assigned by management. According to the contract negotiating team, the intent of the agency is to give management the right to assign work without union approval. “Managers retain the right to choose the best folks for the job,” said Ducharme.

Article 18 – another article discussed Tuesday – concerns Controller in Charge pay. Ducharme explained that CIC was intended in 1998 to provide a cadre of controllers who could augment supervisory positions. Under the new contract, there will no longer be a 10 percent pay premium for this duty.

“There will still be folks in the facilities who want to be CICs because they are self-starters and want to move ahead,” said Ducharme.



Managers listen to guidance regarding contract implementation.

Photo: FAA

Work schedules and staffing numbers were discussed under Article 32, which explains that FAA management is responsible for setting the requirements when they build the work schedule.

“It is a management right to set numbers, types and grades of employees needed to do the work,” Ducharme said. “So on Sept. 3, any agreements you had on schedules, numbers, start and stop times are null and void. You set the new requirements based on the needs of your facility and traffic.”

The schedules and numbers of employees per shift will be set by management every year before Oct. 1. The process of assigning individuals to the watch schedule will be done by Jan. 1, 2007, with the watch schedule posted at least 28 days in advance.

The day wrapped up with questions and answers from the managers in attendance.

Wednesday’s session focuses on management rights, leave and communicating change.



Contract negotiating team members gather in St. Louis.

Photo: FAA



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