

To successfully implement noise abatement procedures at a busy international airport requires the combined efforts of many people in different organizations. The information provided below summarizes the roles of individual aviation organizations, as well as the technical criteria used to develop and assign noise abatement procedures.

Aviation Organizations – There are four critical components to the aviation industry working closely together at airports: the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), airport operators, airlines and pilots.

Aircraft Noise Abatement Office Organizations

roles and responsibilities:

Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)

The FAA is the sole organization in the U.S. responsible for the movement of aircraft both on the ground and in the air. All air traffic controllers work for the FAA as part of our national airspace system.

The FAA is also responsible for designing air travel routes and procedures including standards for lateral and vertical separation between aircraft, determining hazards to aviation such as mountains or tall buildings, and other safety criteria governing both airports and aircraft.

Although other aviation organizations including airports and airlines may petition the FAA regarding noise abatement procedures, only the FAA can make the final determination about what is acceptable, and under what circumstances procedures may be implemented. Most importantly, only FAA controllers may assign a flight procedure to a pilot.

The FAA is also responsible for defining acceptable noise levels for the manufacture of aircraft. These standards have become more stringent over time, and there is an international effort underway to define a new quieter Stage 4 aircraft for the future.

Airports

An airport is generally a local or state entity serving primarily as landlord in the broadest definition of the term. The airport holds leases with tenants including airlines, concessions and airport related businesses, and in that capacity can affect when and where certain operations occur on its property. From a noise abatement perspective this means that an airport can reasonably regulate such activities as engine maintenance runups by controlling where they take place and instituting certain restrictions at night.

As a local entity, the airport is also the closest point of contact with the community and is generally in charge of creating, explaining and implementing noise abatement programs. Thus, the airport is usually responsible for monitoring noise levels and reporting them to the public, as well as taking remedial actions such as soundproofing homes and schools in high impact areas.

As described above, the airport may advocate for certain noise abatement flight procedures to reduce local impacts, but these must be both approved and assigned by the FAA. Airports also actively encourage FAA and Congress to provide noise mitigation funds, and to create and enforce stricter noise abatement standards for the manufacture of aircraft.

Airlines

Airlines own and operate the aircraft and decide routes, schedules and fares. Although all airlines are subject to the FAA national fleet rule requiring all aircraft to meet Stage 3 standards by January 1, 2000, the noise levels of Stage 3 aircraft vary, and some airlines have quieter fleets than others.

Airlines also set their own operating standards including noise abatement departure profiles. For noise reduction purposes, engine power is often cut back on departure over sensitive areas. However, the exact nature of this cut back (how much it is reduced and at what altitude) is determined by the individual airline, pilot and situation.

Pilots

As the person in charge of operating the aircraft, the pilot has the ultimate responsibility. Although the airline sets the noise abatement departure profile, and the FAA assigns the flight track and altitude, the pilot still maintains the authority to make final judgment. Based on safety criteria, the pilot may alter these procedures. In general, it is up to the pilot to adhere to noise abatement procedures whether for departure or arrival.

Operational Factors

Many variables are involved in the assignment of aircraft to specific noise abatement procedures. Among these are wind strength and direction, visibility, volume of air traffic, mix of aircraft types, and navigation equipment available on each individual aircraft. The FAA Air Traffic Control Tower assigns the specific runway and procedure to be used based on all of these variables. On occasion, operational considerations, such as a very heavy aircraft, cause a pilot to request an alternate (longer) runway assignment.

As a general rule, there is more flexibility in assigning noise abatement procedures when the weather is good and the number of aircraft in the area is fairly low. Under poor weather conditions, poor visibility, high wind speeds and other conditions requiring increased separation of aircraft and use of instruments, options are more limited.

Fortunately airports tend to be the least busy at night. For this reason, noise abatement flight procedures can be most often adhered to late at night when people are most likely to be disturbed by overflights.

how to reach us

SFO Aircraft Noise Abatement Office mailing address is:
P.O. Box 8097, San Francisco, CA 94128

Phone:	650.821.5100
Fax:	650.821.5112
Noise Complaint Line:	650.821.4736
Toll Free Noise Complaint Line:	877.206.8290
Noise Complaint E-mail:	sfo.noise@flysf.com
Airport Web Page:	www.flysf.com
Noise Abatement Web Page:	www.flyquietsfo.com
Roundtable Web Page:	www.sforoundtable.org