

# AIR TAP Briefings

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## Minimum standards help ensure safe operations

Minimum standards set the conditions all operators must meet to provide an on-airport commercial service. These standards are meant to ensure safety in operations and compliance with Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) rules and regulations, prevent discrimination, protect the investment of service providers, provide opportunities for newcomers, and inform airport businesses of what training and procedures are required to operate.

A session at the 2016 Minnesota Airports Conference on minimum standards featured the perspectives of three aviation experts on this topic: Pablo Nuesch, a Washington, DC, attorney who represents the municipal sector and airports; John DeCoster from Trillion Aviation, a consulting firm based in Austin, Texas; and Evan Wilson, senior legal counsel for the Metropolitan Airports Commission.

Besides addressing safety, minimum standards ensure the availability and levels of service at the airport, which could allow an airport to raise the bar for new entrants and tenants. (MnDOT Aeronautics director

Cassandra Isackson reminded attendees that every commercial service provider must be licensed and insured and should appear on the official list posted on MnDOT's Office of Aeronautics website.) Minimum standards also help airports create a level playing field for all commercial operators. This in turn creates a healthy business environment, especially if leases outline that a portion of rent is based on revenue: if the business does well, so does the airport. And minimum standards create a standard, objective process for reacting to issues and concerns.

Airports should review their minimum standards periodically to identify if there's been a change in airport operations that will impact business—for example, a change in the fleet mix, a change in service providers, or an unfulfilled need. The FAA cautions airports against changing the minimum standards too often, however.

Although the FAA does not require minimum standards, airport owners must comply with grant assurances. Minimum standards are directly tied to grant assurances:

when airport owners or sponsors, planning agencies, or other organizations accept funds from FAA-administered airport financial assistance programs, they must agree to certain obligations, or assurances. These obligations require the recipients to maintain and operate their facilities safely and efficiently and in accordance with specified conditions. "Airports cannot unjustly discriminate between users or businesses at the airport or grant an 'exclusive right,'" Nuesch said.

Nuesch noted that the FAA provides guidance for minimum standards in its *Airport Compliance Manual* (FAA order 5190.6B from October 2009, available at [FAA.gov](http://FAA.gov)), along with an advisory circular (AC 150/5190-7) attached as an exhibit to the manual.

Minimum standards can provide a transparent way to provide a level playing field, Nuesch continued. If standards are reasonable, attainable, uniformly applied, and protect the users of the airport from bad providers, they can act as a shield for the airport owner.

*Minimum standards* continued on page 2

## An airport's story: Buffalo Municipal Airport

This fall, you can visit the Buffalo Municipal Airport as it hosts the second day of the 2016 AirTAP Fall Forum. The airport is owned by the City of Buffalo, which is located 40 miles northwest of Minneapolis in Wright County, Minnesota.

The airport features one 3,200 x 75-ft. bituminous runway and full parallel taxiway that were constructed in 2010.

More than 70 based aircraft call the Buffalo Municipal Airport home. They are housed in 23 private hangars and 3 city-owned T-hangars that house an additional 26 spots. The city operates a 24-hour self-service fuel station.

West Metro Aviation is the airport's fixed-base operator. Its commercial hangar houses a NASCAR-style shop where staff perform aircraft maintenance and restoration on all general aviation aircraft brands including American Champion, Aviat, Beechcraft, Cessna, Cirrus, Mooney, and Piper. West Metro Aviation also sells airplanes. Owner Mike Wisusc is a professional aerobatic pilot who participates in the Buffalo air show every other year.

Another aviation-related business at the airport is D'Shannon Aviation, which manufactures and installs after-market modifications for Beechcraft Bonanza, Debonair, and Baron aircraft. The busi-

ness began 50 years ago and, as a supplemental type certificate (STC) holder, works with clients around the world to upgrade and enhance general aviation aircraft.

This year marks the 50th anniversary for the airport, which opened with a grass strip in 1966. In the spring of 1980, MnDOT Aeronautics allocated money to pave hard surfaces around the airport's two T-hangars and taxiways to the north and middle entrances of the runway. With the help of many volunteers and donations, a paved runway measuring 2600 x 60 ft. was completed in the fall of 1986. The paving of the runway led to Buffalo Aviation opening its doors in the old operations building while construction of an 80 x 100-ft. commercial hangar (now owned by D'Shannon Aviation) was erected. Other additions in the years that followed were additional hangars and an Automated Weather Observation System. In early 2010, approval of an airport improvement project resulted in a runway extension, new full-length parallel taxiway, runway pilot-controlled lighting and PAPIs, a larger ramp area, a larger parking lot with new south and north access roads with security gates, and new retention drainage ponds.



*The Buffalo airport's arrival/departure building*

The Buffalo airport is managed by Chris Fredrick, who also serves as the city's marketing director. Fredrick's expertise in marketing has resulted in several initiatives that bring the community to the airport, including opening the 1,600-sq.-ft. arrival/departure building for meetings and community events (nonprofits can use the room for free).

He's also active with local Rotary and Lions groups and works closely with the community, the tourism department, and the chamber of commerce to publicize airport news. In addition, the airport hosts an annual air show in June in conjunction with the city's Buffalo Days event; the 2016 air show drew an estimated 2,500 visitors.



Without minimum standards, businesses on an airport can operate in ways that are unsafe, illegal, or exclusive, DeCoster added. This exposes the airport and the airport manager to problems.

Wilson emphasized that creating minimum standards does not have to be a huge effort, but standards should be carefully thought out. To get started, organize your thoughts and draft a document, he said. Then address each activity separately and work through standards for each.

He then walked the audience through a five-step process for preparing minimum standards. Step one is to gather all your data. Consider the services that airport businesses are required to perform, under what general conditions, and their space requirements. This step also includes determining:

- what the design aircraft is and who's using it
- current trends and types of operations the airport is seeing
- presence of corporate or recreational activity
- needs of the users
- makeup of the businesses
- safety issues
- availability of space for both new operators and for existing ones to expand

Step two is to consider which process to use to enforce the minimum standards. Is it going to be an airport-wide policy?

Will it be part of lease agreements? Look at your current leases, Wilson advised. Do you have the ability to impose new standards? When can you make changes?

Step three is to read the FAA compliance manual and advisory circular on minimum standards. The FAA has developed a list of questions and issues that could prove useful, Wilson said.

For step four, the airport will need to identify goals and determine whether they are consistent. For example, an airport might set a standard for customer service on the airfield and then consider how minimum standards could help accomplish that goal.

The last step is for the airport to get stakeholder input and finalize the standards.

DeCoster noted that standards do not have to be the same for all services, as that will set barriers to entry. "Don't put in hard numbers. Use general standards for operations," he said.

When it comes to the level of investment, Nuesch said that protecting the investment of the incumbent operator is a fine line. "Minimum standards can play a huge role in providing stability," he said. "It's important to encourage business to come to the airport, but airports need to protect themselves." Nuesch also reminded attendees that regardless of whether they have a formal or informal set of standards, they must make sure standards are relevant and attainable.

Some airports have a minimum investment required for certain types of airports—such as minimum leased space, minimum hangar requirements, parking requirements, or insurance requirements.

Related to the issue of fairness, if the airport management on site is a fixed-base operator (FBO), Nuesch suggested airports have two agreements: one for serving as the FBO and one for managing the airport.

## Mark your calendar for these upcoming events!

### AirTAP Fall Forum

Join us in Buffalo for this year's Fall Forum, once again a two-day event. The fall colors should be spectacular, and the forum will be packed with indoor and outdoor educational activities. The first day, held at the Wild Marsh Golf Club, will include a variety of technical topics and collaborative sessions, while the second day will feature demonstrations at the Buffalo Municipal Airport. Don't miss this opportunity to network with colleagues, learn about best practices, share ideas, and hear about innovative solutions.

Online registration is now available on the AirTAP website ([airtap.umn.edu/events/forum/2016/](http://airtap.umn.edu/events/forum/2016/)), and the event brochure with additional program information will be mailed in late August.

### Minnesota Airports Conference

The annual Minnesota Airports Conference is held each year in April at locations around the state. The conference features experts in aviation and aerospace fields sharing their experiences in general assembly presentations, workshops, and open forums. Held in conjunction with the Minnesota Council of Airports annual meeting, the event also includes technical and safety presentations, an airport tour, an industry trade show, an awards and recognition program, and networking opportunities.

The 2017 conference is scheduled for April 12–14 in Mankato, Minnesota. Details will be posted on the AirTAP website as they become available.

"They should be completely separate and well defined," he said.

A final tip: "Listen to your tenants," Nuesch offered. "They know what's going on."

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