

PRIVATE PILOT GROUND SCHOOL

MODULE 1-14 — LOST COMMUNICATIONS (THE MUMBLE)

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FACTS TO REMEMBER

KNOW THESE COLD

- A silent radio is diagnosed before it is declared dead: volume and squelch, correct frequency, correct radio selected, audio panel switches, headset plugs, hand mic as backup.

Source: AIM 4-2-13

- Common causes of "lost comm" that aren't failures: wrong frequency dialed, transmit selector on the other radio, a pulled-back volume knob, an unplugged headset — which is why the checklist beats panic.

Source: AIM 4-2-13

- Receiver-only failure: transmit intentions in the blind ("transmitting blind"), state position and intentions, and watch for light gun signals.

Source: AIM 4-2-13; AIM 6-4-1

- Transmitter-only failure: acknowledge ATC by rocking wings (day) or flashing lights (night) and comply with light-gun instructions.

Source: AIM 4-3-13

- If the radio dies, squawk 7600 — the transponder tells ATC what the radio cannot.

Source: AIM 6-4-2

- Lost communication under VFR is not, by itself, an emergency: fly the airplane, stay VFR, and work the arrival plan — the airplane never needed the radio to fly.

Source: AIM 6-4-1

- NORDO arrival at a towered field (the 91.126(d)/91.129(d) rule): you may operate and land if weather is at or above basic VFR minimums, you keep visual contact with the tower, and you receive a clearance to land — the steady green light.

Source: 14 CFR 91.129(d)(2); 14 CFR 91.126(d)

- The NORDO towered arrival technique: remain clear, observe the flow and runway in use, enter the pattern conforming to it, and watch the tower for the light gun on downwind and final.

Source: AIM 4-3-13; AIM 4-2-13

- Flashing red or no light on final means go around and re-enter — landing without the green at a towered field is landing without a clearance.

Source: 14 CFR 91.129(d)(2)(iii); AIM 4-3-13

- NORDO at a nontowered field: fly the standard pattern with extra vigilance — everyone else is self-announcing around an airplane they cannot hear.

Source: AC 90-66C; AIM 4-1-9

- If the silence came from the electrical system (ammeter discharge, dimming panel), the problem is bigger than the radio: shed load, plan battery minutes, and prefer landing over troubleshooting (system work is 1-9's drill).

Source: PA-28-151 POH sec. 4; AIM 6-4-1

- Prevention habits: radio check before taxi, both radios tuned when two exist, frequencies pre-set for the route, and the light-gun table reviewed cold before every tower-field solo.

Source: AIM 4-3-13

GOING DEEPER

- A stuck microphone blocks the whole frequency for everyone; if the frequency goes strangely quiet after your call, check your own PTT first.

Source: AIM 4-2-2

- A phone is a legal and practical backup: after landing NORDDO — and in flight if workload truly allows — the tower's number is in the Chart Supplement.

Source: Chart Supplement; AIM 4-2-13

- The IFR lost-comm rule (91.185) is a different animal for a different rating — a VFR pilot's rule is stay VFR and land; do not fly a remembered IFR procedure.

Source: 14 CFR 91.185; 14 CFR 91.126(d)

THE REGULATIONS BEHIND THIS MODULE

14 CFR 91.129(d) – Communications failure in Class D airspace

If the aircraft radio fails in flight under VFR, the pilot in command may operate that aircraft and land if weather conditions are at or above basic VFR weather minimums, visual contact with the tower is maintained, and a clearance to land is received.

Where it goes deeper: This module, in the towered arrival Leg.

14 CFR 91.185 – IFR operations: two-way radio communications failure

A pilot with a radio failure while operating under IFR follows this section. If the failure occurs in VFR conditions, or VFR conditions are met after the failure, the pilot continues under VFR and lands as soon as practicable. The route and altitude rules apply in IFR conditions.

Where it goes deeper: This module names the rule and sets it aside: a VFR pilot's rule is stay VFR and land.