

5/15/2026

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

2026-170/7-5

To: FAA (ATM ZLC ARTCC, ATM HLN TRACON)

2349826, 2237011

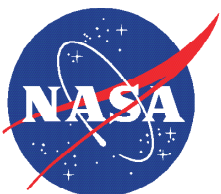
Info: FAA (AVP-1, AVP-200, AFS-260, AFS-200, Director of Air Traffic Operations CSA),
A4A, AAAE, ALPA, AOPA, APA, ASAP, ATSG, EAA, ICAO, ICASS, IFALPA, IPA,
NAFI, NBAA, NTSB, RAA, SWAPA

From: Becky L. Hooey, Director
NASA Aviation Safety Reporting System

Re: ZLC/HLN TRACON Operational Concerns

We recently received ASRS reports describing a safety concern that may involve your area of operational responsibility. We do not have sufficient details to assess either the factual accuracy or possible gravity of the report. It is our policy to relay the reported information to the appropriate authority for evaluation and any necessary follow-up. We feel you should be aware of the enclosed deidentified report.

To properly assess the usefulness of our alert message service, we would appreciate it if you would take the time to give us your feedback on the value of the information that we have provided. Please contact Dr. Becky Hooey at (408) 541-2854 or email at becky.l.hooey@nasa.gov.



Aviation Safety Reporting System
P.O. Box 189 | Moffett Field, CA | 94035-0189



ACN 2349826**DATE / TIME**

Date of Occurrence	202604
Local Time Of Day	1801 to 2400

PLACE

Locale	ZLC.ARTCC
State	UT

ENVIRONMENT

Flight Conditions	VMC
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AIRCRAFT / EQUIPMENT X

ATC / Advisory - Center	ZLC
Make Model Name	Small Aircraft, High Wing, 1 Eng, Fixed Gear
Operating Under FAR Part	91

PERSON 1

Function - Air Traffic Control	Enroute
ASRS Report Number	2349826

EVENTS

Anomaly	ATC Issue - All Types
Anomaly	Ground Event / Encounter - Ground Equipment Issue
Anomaly	No Specific Anomaly Occurred - Unwanted Situation
Detector - Person	Air Traffic Control

NARRATIVE 1

Aircraft X was on VFR flight following at 10,500 and transiting through Helena (HLN) non radar Approach Control airspace. The Sector XX controller told them radar service terminated and shipped them to HLN Approach frequency per LOA (Letter of Agreement), when the aircraft was exiting west of HLN's airspace the aircraft never checked in.

I was training a trainee on D XX and we had him call HLN Approach to have them try the aircraft again. They responded that they didn't even know the aircraft was on VFR flight following so they never shipped the aircraft to us. This resulted in a lot of coordination trying to get a hold of the aircraft, which we never did. Multiple phone calls were made to Spokane Approach to advise them of the situation and let them know the aircraft is NORDO. We called HLN Approach again to see exactly what the controller told the pilot. HLN told us that they told the aircraft to report 20 miles west of HLN VOR and at that time told the aircraft change to advisory frequency approved. The Supervisor had to call the OMIC (Operations Manager in Charge) and discuss whether or not this warranted us being able to remove strips on the aircraft. The aircraft was still on their squawk code the entire flight, because they were never told to squawk VFR. The pilot did nothing wrong.

There has been talk with recent meetings with Helena Approach to discuss other issues that the controllers there often throw away active flight progress strips. I'm not sure if this happened in this situation, but if HLN Approach had seen the strip for the aircraft they would realize the aircraft was on flight following and needed to be shipped back to Center once leaving their airspace. The aircraft was transiting westbound from the BIL area through HLN airspace and landing at 7S0, Ronan airport.

Have Helena Approach keep strips to ensure this doesn't happen again and maintain clarity of which aircraft are or aren't on flight following. This required a LOT of extra coordination for the controllers. I have also heard that HLN Approach has discussed that they sometimes don't receive all of the strips they need for aircraft, so perhaps there is an issue with their FDIO (Flight Data Input/Output). They have had several FDIO outages lately which have required a lot of manual coordination.

SYNOPSIS

A Center controller reported HLN non radar TRACON issued a VFR aircraft a frequency change to advisory frequency instead of the Center frequency contrary to established procedure.

ACN 2237011

DATE / TIME

Date of Occurrence	202504
Local Time Of Day	1201 to 1800

PLACE

Locale	HLN.Airport
State	MT
Altitude - MSL	10000

AIRCRAFT / EQUIPMENT X

ATC / Advisory - TRACON	HLN
Make Model Name	SR22
Operating Under FAR Part	91

PERSON 1

Function - Air Traffic Control	Approach
ASRS Report Number	2237011

EVENTS

Anomaly	ATC Issue - All Types
Anomaly	Deviation - Altitude - Excursion From Assigned Altitude
Anomaly	Deviation / Discrepancy - Procedural - Clearance
Anomaly	Inflight Event / Encounter - CFTT / CFIT
Detector - Person	Air Traffic Control
Result - Flight Crew	Returned To Clearance
Result - Air Traffic Control	Issued Advisory / Alert
Result - Air Traffic Control	Issued New Clearance

NARRATIVE 1

Aircraft X checked in on frequency, 40 southeast of HLN at 12,000. I asked for a report of 10 miles southeast of HLN. At that point I was going to issue a descent as they exited different MIA (Minimum IFR Altitude) shelves to the SE headed to the HLN VOR for a VOR-A approach. When they reported the 10 miles they reported level at 10,000. I asked them to say again to make sure I heard correctly, they again said they were at 10,000. I then issued a low altitude alert and a climbed to a safe altitude. The aircraft continued without further incident.

There continues to be issues with things like this, where HLN in its current state without any type of surveillance and relying and trusting that pilots are always doing the right thing and then they bust an altitude assignment. Change would be recommended to get some kind of display for the sole purpose of situational awareness at the very least.

SYNOPSIS

HLN TRACON Controller reported an aircraft descended below its assigned altitude and flew 2,000 feet below the Minimum IFR Altitude. Reporter stated they did not know the aircraft descended because their facility does not have radar.