

5/1/2026

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

2026-156/7-2

To: FAA (ATM ZMA ARTCC)

2345925

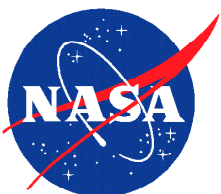
Info: FAA (AVP-1, AVP-200, AFS-260, AFS-200, Director of Air Traffic Operations ESA South), A4A, AAAE, ALPA, AOPA, APA, ASAP, ATSG, ICAO, ICASS, IFALPA, IPA, NAFI, NATCA, NBAA, NTSB, RAA, SWAPA

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

Re: ZMA ATC 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 2345925**DATE / TIME**

Date of Occurrence	202603
Local Time Of Day	1801 to 2400

PLACE

Locale	ZMA.ARTCC
State	FL
Altitude - MSL	31000

AIRCRAFT / EQUIPMENT X

ATC / Advisory - Center	ZMA
Make Model Name	Commercial Fixed Wing
Operating Under FAR Part	121

AIRCRAFT / EQUIPMENT Y

ATC / Advisory - Center	ZMA
Make Model Name	Commercial Fixed Wing
Operating Under FAR Part	121

PERSON 1

Function - Air Traffic Control	Enroute
ASRS Report Number	2345925

EVENTS

Anomaly	ATC Issue - All Types
Anomaly	Deviation / Discrepancy - Procedural - Published
	Material / Policy
Detector - Person	Air Traffic Control
Result - Air Traffic Control	Separated Traffic

NARRATIVE 1

On Day 0, while working a very busy sector XX, I was placed in an operational situation that I believed was unsafe due to traffic saturation, excessive workload, and the lack of safe alternatives. I was advised by the Controller in Charge that sector XY was going to shut me off and that, if not, I would need to hold and/or vector aircraft because of the traffic volume. I immediately stated that, given the complexity of the operation, the safest course of action was to ground stop departures rather than continue feeding traffic into an overloaded sector or require tactical vectoring in already saturated airspace.

I was then advised that, at managements request, I was expected to spin aircraft. I stated that I would not do so because, in my judgment, vectoring aircraft in close proximity at the same altitudes during a high-workload saturated operation was unsafe and created unacceptable risk. I advised that I would instead descend aircraft and call them to the sector that owned FL240 through FL340, which I believed was the safer alternative under the circumstances.

The aircraft I specifically recall being involved were Aircraft X and Aircraft Y at FL310 and FL330. Aircraft Z may also have been involved in the overall situation, although I do not specifically recall shipping that aircraft without a handoff.

As Aircraft X and Aircraft Y approached the sector boundary, my Radar Associate initiated a handoff to sector XZ. The receiving controller advised that he was unable and would not take the handoff. I then got on the line myself as the Radar Position and explained that we were extremely busy, that sector XY was shutting us off, and that we needed assistance. The receiving controller again refused to accept the aircraft. At that point, I believed I had been left without a safe operational alternative. In my judgment, additional vectoring or spinning of aircraft in that environment would have created a greater and more immediate hazard. I therefore advised that I was going to ship the aircraft without handoffs because no safe alternative was being made available to me.

In my judgment, the more dangerous action would have been to vector and spin aircraft at the same altitude during a saturated, high-workload operation, as I had been directed to do.

There was an expectation of compliance even where safety concerns had been raised.

I am concerned that this event reflects a broader pattern in which unsafe operational situations are allowed to develop and persist without sufficient corrective action. When controllers raise legitimate safety concerns and are met with pressure rather than support and mitigation, operational risk is normalized instead of corrected. If these conditions are allowed to continue unchecked, unfortunate consequences may result.

I am submitting this report because I believe I was placed in an unsafe operational situation, was directed to take action that I believed increased risk, and refused to compromise safety. A stronger stand for safety must be taken by management to ensure controllers are supported in making safe operational decisions and to protect and preserve human life.

Establish clear procedures for sector saturation events so departures are stopped, sectors are shut off, or other traffic management initiatives are implemented before controllers are forced into unsafe tactical situations.

Controllers should not be directed to use tactics they identify in real time as unsafe. When a controller raises a safety objection, management should be required to assess and mitigate the hazard rather than pressure compliance.

Require immediate supervisory escalation when a receiving sector refuses handoffs during a saturation event so the controller is not left without a safe operational outlet.

Provide additional training for management and supervisory personnel on safety culture, operational risk management, and response to controller-raised safety concerns, with emphasis on supporting safe decisions.

Conduct a review of staffing, traffic flow practices, workload management, and recurring saturation events to determine whether unsafe conditions are being allowed to develop without timely corrective action.

Reinforce through policy and practice that protecting human life and operational safety takes priority over production pressure or unquestioned compliance with management direction.

I respectfully recommend that this event be reviewed not as an isolated occurrence, but as a warning of broader workload, coordination, and safety-culture issues that require corrective action before a more serious incident occurs.

SYNOPSIS

ZMA Enroute Air Traffic Controller reported a situation where another sector implemented a no notice airspace closure resulting in making their sector overloaded and highly complex with no plan of action to resolve the issue and others allowing more aircraft to enter the airspace.