

# Answers for Pilots: Pilot Certificates

By **Kathy Dondzila**

If you're confused about whether you need to replace your pilot certificate with a newer version, you're not alone. Lately, many of the questions members ask when they call AOPA's Pilot Information Center concern their pilot certificates. Pilots have heard about plastic pilot certificates or English-speaking endorsements, but don't know the details, or whether the requirements apply to them. Here's the scoop.

## **Plastic Pilot Certificates**

Every pilot is required to obtain a plastic pilot certificate by March 31, 2010. All other paper certificates (Ground Instructor, Mechanic (Part 65) and those issued under Part 63) must be replaced with plastic ones by March 21, 2013.

The FAA's mandate is based on the reasoning that plastic certificates are more counterfeit resistant than paper ones. For newly certificated pilots, compliance is automatic, since all new certificates are being issued in plastic. For those who have paper certificates in their wallets, a replacement certificate can be requested online or through the mail. The online process is not too difficult and FAA states a two-week fulfillment. (I recently applied online and received my plastic certificate exactly one week later.) Details on how to apply are included at the end of this article. What's more, FAA is putting the English proficient endorsement on all plastic certificates – both new and replacements – issued to U.S. pilots.

## **The English Proficient Endorsement**

Effective March 5, 2009, FAA mandated compliance with the International Civil Aviation Organization's (ICAO) rule that all member countries (that includes the U.S.) issue pilot certificates that state the pilot is English Proficient if that pilot plans to use the certificate outside of his or her home country. All new FAA pilot certificates will automatically be issued with the English Proficient endorsement on the back, since proficiency in the English language has been a long-standing FAA requirement for basic eligibility for a U.S. airman certificate (the applicant must be able to read, write, speak, and understand English). To satisfy the ICAO requirement for flight outside of the United States, every pilot must request a replacement certificate with the endorsement from FAA. All replacement certificates will automatically be plastic.

## **How to Request a New or Replacement Pilot Certificate**

The easiest way to get a new or replacement certificate is online. Go to [FAA's Airmen Online Services](#). If you already have an account, just log in. If you are not yet registered, you'll have to create an account. Follow the steps to receive your certificate in about two weeks. If you happen to hold a rating that is no longer issued (such as Glider Aero-Tow), the online system will not process it and you will have to use the paper application process. To request a replacement certificate by mail, write to Federal Aviation Administration, Airmen Certification Branch, AFS-760, P. O. Box 25082, Oklahoma City, OK 73125-0082. Your signed, written request must include the following information: Your name, date and place of birth, social security number and/or certificate number, the reason for the request, and your current address. Include a check for \$2.00 for each replacement certificate requested.

Questions? Give us a call in the Pilot Information Center, 1-800-USA-AOPA (872-2672) between 8:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. Eastern time, Monday through Friday.

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