

GAO: Urgent Need for More Aviation Meteorologists

By Gordon Gilbert, Aviation Online Contributor
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A newly released [report](#) from the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) warns that the number of aviation meteorologists has fallen considerably, with the remaining staff severely under strain to provide needed services. It recommends that the FAA identify related risks and take “urgent action to address them.”

Under a 2016 agreement between the FAA and the National Weather Service (NWS)—set to expire next month—the NWS was required to staff 90 positions with full-time meteorologists at the FAA’s 21 ATC Center facilities. The FAA then reimburses the NWS for the associated costs, subject to the availability of annual appropriations.

In July 2024, the FAA said it planned to reduce the number of meteorologists to 71 by the end of last year, but the NWS urged the FAA to reconsider, stating that this could lead to serious safety and economic consequences. Ultimately, the agencies agreed to cap staffing at 81 for fiscal year 2025. This maintained the status quo since natural attrition kept staff at an average of 81 meteorologists from 2019 to 2024.

According to the NWS, as of this June, the number had fallen to 69; staffing levels have been affected by the Trump Administration’s federal hiring freeze and deferred resignation program. Having fewer meteorologists “has strained the remaining staff,” said the GAO. “Across the 21 central weather service units, five are staffed with one or two meteorologists, while eight are staffed with four each.”

The GAO is recommending that the FAA identify potential risks to the safety and efficiency of the National Airspace System caused by current meteorologist staffing levels and “take urgent action to address them.” The Transportation Department responded that it is “collaborating with the NWS to develop a new service delivery model for the future.”

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