

VATSIM DC SFRA Procedures

1. General

a. The Washington Special Flight Rules Area (SFRA or "Sifra") and Flight Restriction Zone (FRZ or "Freeze") are two airspaces published via TFR around the Washington D.C. area for national security. Additional procedures require constant communication with ATC and special filing of flight plans via ZDC Flight Data. While some of these procedures are impractical or impossible to emulate on VATSIM, some are. This section will provide context on real-world procedures and operational policy for use on VATSIM.

b. The SFRA consists of an area extending 30nm from the DCA VOR, from the surface to FL180. The FRZ is a more localized area closer to DCA, approximately 15nm radius, including DCA, ADW, CGS, DAA, and VKX. In real life, entry into the SFRA requires filing a specific SFRA flight plan, beacon code, and online training course. The Leesburg Maneuvering Area is a cutout of the SFRA overhead of the Leesburg Airport (JYO). Aircraft are not required to file an SFRA flight plan while operating directly from or directly to JYO under VFR within the Leesburg Maneuvering Area boundary, nor do the aircraft need to contact Air Traffic Control when Leesburg Tower is closed.

c. The FRZ is more heavily restricted and requires a unique PIN number, only issued after a background check and fingerprinting, and filing a flight plan over the phone with Washington ARTCC Flight Data. Aircraft may not fly pattern work within the FRZ, nor may they loiter. While SFRA procedures are realistic to simulate, FRZ procedures are impossible and impractical to enforce, and they should be treated as simply another area of the SFRA. Therefore, pattern work and normal VFR operations shall be permitted within the FRZ on VATSIM.

d. When operating within the SFRA, regardless of the type of flight rules, the aircraft must have the following:

1. An operable two-way radio capable of communicating with Air Traffic Control on appropriate radio frequencies;
2. An operating automatic altitude reporting transponder.

e. For any type of flight operation in the SFRA, the pilot must also comply with the existing requirements to operate in the airspace within.

f. At no time should an aircraft be squawking 1200 (VFR) within 30nm of the DCA VOR (inside the SFRA). An aircraft should obtain and continuously transmit a discrete beacon code anytime in the air, with the following exceptions:

1. When flying in a VFR traffic pattern at a Class D airport, squawk 1234

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2. When operating directly from or directly to JYO under VFR within the Leesburg Maneuvering Area, squawk 1226

3. When departing from a fringe airport without filing an SFRA flight plan and without ATC communication, squawk 1205

g. If an aircraft fails to establish the required transponder or communications requirements within the SFRA on VATSIM, the controllers shall:

1. Utilize “.contactme” to attempt to establish communications with the pilot
2. Verbally inform the pilot that communication with ATC is required within the SFRA
3. Send DC SFRA pilot resources to the pilot via private message
4. Notify VATSIM Network Supervisors of possible B3(a) and/or B8(b) violations.

EXAMPLE-

“.wallop N123AB NORDO within DC SFRA”

5. Coordinate with available vSOA members for interception if desired and workload permitting.

2. SFRA Positions and responsibilities

a. There are three SFRA positions within the PCT, one within each area other than JRV:

| Position | Area | Frequency | STARS Handoff |
|----------|------|-----------|---------------|
| SFRAE | CHP | 132.775 | 1Z |
| SFRAW | SHD | 127.325 | 3G |
| SFRAS | MTV | 125.125 | 1R |

b. SFRA sectors (depicted below) do not own any airspace. Instead, they track VFR aircraft within their portion of the SFRA and issue discrete beacon codes to those aircraft. If aircraft want an IFR clearance, they shall be transferred to the correct radar sector for their airport. If an aircraft wants VFR flight following, the SFRA sector shall create a flight plan with all information (aircraft, altitude, destination, departure, gate) and handoff to the correct radar sector with coordination.

c. When SFRA positions are not opened, controllers shall assume the SFRA positions within the areas they are responsible for. Controllers should reference the consolidation table below if multiple sectors within an area are staffed.

Diagram 1. SFRA airspace

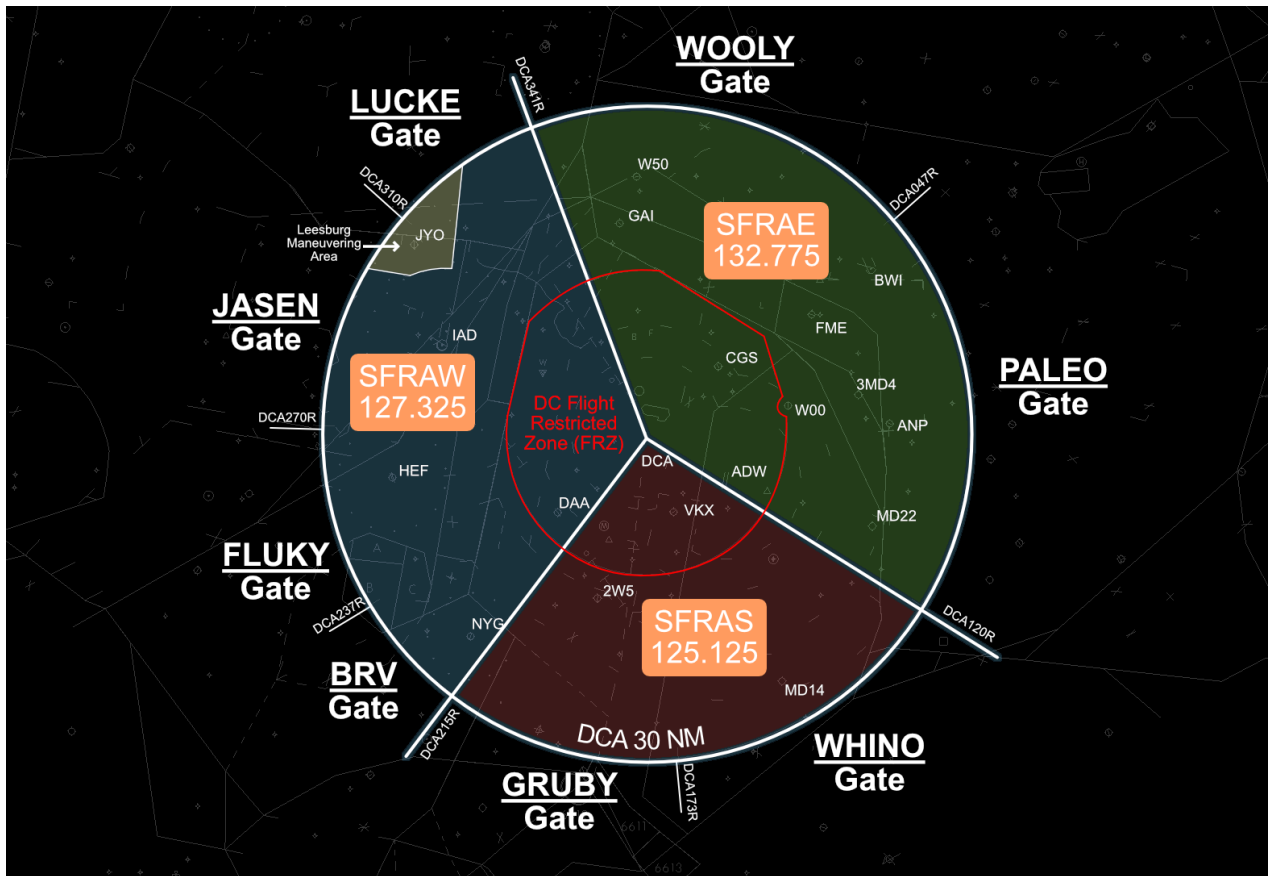
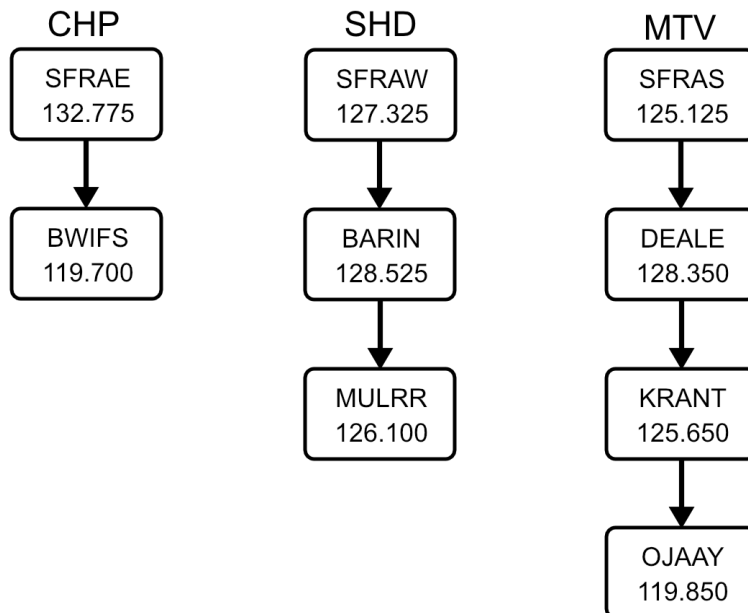


Diagram 2. SFRA Positions Consolidation



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3. IFR Procedure

- a. When departing from a nontowered airport, aircraft are not permitted to depart VFR and pick up an IFR transponder code and clearance in the air.
- b. When arriving at a nontowered airport, aircraft shall keep the discrete transponder code until on the ground, even after terminating radar services or canceling the IFR flight plan.

PHRASEOLOGY-

“Remain on the code until you land.”

4. VATSIM SFRA Flight Plan

- a. Pilots are instructed to file an IFR flight plan to operate within the SFRA even if they are VFR. This step forces vNAS to generate the discrete transponder code required to operate in the SFRA, and it also allows controllers to see the aircraft type and the gates they intend to use.
- b. Pilots shall file their intended departure and destination airport as normal, then specify the gates they intend to enter or exit the SFRA in the route. For example, “DEP/PALEO DEST/LUCKE”. If the pilot is filing a flight plan for pattern work, they should file the airport code plus “360001” in the route. For example: “GAI360001”.
- c. To avoid congestion, aircraft may enter and exit the SFRA at any point within the area of the gate listed on the SFRA flight plan.
- d. Adding the RMK/SFRA in the remarks is optional.

5. VFR Exit Procedures

- a. Pilots shall file an appropriate flight plan and obtain the discrete transponder code and departure frequency before departure.
 1. If the airport is non-towered, the pilot shall contact the respective SFRA frequency.

EXAMPLE-

“Skyhawk 123AB, Potomac Clearance, squawk 5367, departure frequency 132.77.”

2. If the aircraft departs from a Class D airport, the pilot shall contact ATC before taxi.

Example: “Skyhawk 123AB, Manassas ground, squawk 0227, departure frequency 127.32. Advise ready to taxi.”

3. If the aircraft departs from a Class B airport, there is no SFRA-specific VFR departure procedure.

b. Pilots shall contact Potomac as soon as they are clear of the airport traffic area, normally within 2-3 nm.

1. Since radar services are not provided, controllers do not need to utilize radar identification methods. Instead of stating “radar contact”, “transponder observed” shall be used.

2. The aircraft shall also be instructed to “proceed on course, remain outside the Bravo” as the authorization to operate within the SFRA.

EXAMPLE-

“Skyhawk 123AB, Potomac Approach, transponder observed, proceed on course, remain outside the Bravo.”

c. If the aircraft requests flight following or a Class B transition, the SFRA position must APREQ the appropriate non-SFRA position. A new transponder shall be issued for radar identification purposes.

d. The pilot shall be advised when the aircraft departs from the SFRA. The SFRA flight plan is considered closed.

1. If the aircraft is tracked by a non-SFRA position and receiving flight following, the controller can keep the aircraft for further services if desired.

EXAMPLE-

“Skyhawk 123AB, you are outside the SFRA, squawk VFR, frequency change approved.”

6. VFR Entry Procedures

a. Pilots shall file an appropriate flight plan and obtain the discrete transponder code from the appropriate SFRA position before entering the SFRA.

b. Upon initial contact, the pilot shall be issued the discrete transponder code and instructed to remain outside the SFRA. If they are unfamiliar with this terminology, controllers shall issue suggested VFR headings to keep the aircraft clear of the SFRA.

EXAMPLE-

“Skyhawk 123AB, squawk 4755, remain outside the SFRA.”

c. Upon observing the transponder, the pilot shall be instructed to “proceed on course, and remain outside the Bravo” as the authorization to operate within the SFRA.

d. No further actions are needed if the aircraft is tracked by a non-SFRA position and receiving flight following.

e. The controller may state “cleared into the SFRA” to emphasize the authorization.

f. The aircraft shall be switched to local or advisory frequency when in the vicinity of the destination airport. The aircraft shall be instructed to keep the transponder code until they land.

g. The SFRA flight plan is closed upon landing; no further action is required.

7. VFR Traffic Pattern Operations

a. If the tower is open, no SFRA flight plan is required.

b. If the tower is closed or the airport is non-towered, the pilot shall file an SFRA flight plan and obtain a discrete transponder code from Potomac TRACON before departure.

Further Readings

This guide only covers the VATSIM applicable normal scenarios and is far from complete. For more information, controllers are encouraged to study the relevant real-world materials as they can be easily found online. Here are a few helpful resources:

FAA SFRA training course notes:

<https://www.faa.gov/files/gslac/courses/content/405/1310/200115%20SFRA%20Course%20NOTES.pdf>

FAA DC SFRA checklist and quick reference:

<https://www.faa.gov/files/gslac/courses/content/405/1310/200115%20Kneeboard%20-%20DC%20SFRA%20Checklist.pdf>

FAA JYO Procedures checklist and quick reference:

<https://www.faa.gov/files/gslac/courses/content/405/1310/200115%20Kneeboard%20-%20JYO%20DC%20SFRA%20Checklist.pdf>

Real-world required training course for pilots:

<https://www.faa.gov/gslac/ALC/CourseLanding.aspx?cID=405>

DC SFRA Presentation by Open Sky Aviation LLC:

http://www.flying20club.org/documents/DC_SFRA_Presentation.pdf

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