Making a Ramp Check painless (with checklist)

Declan Selleck
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As countries around the world start to relax their Covid-related travel bans and open up to international flights again, the US FAA has issued a reminder to operators that the **EU Ramp Inspection Program (RIP)** is still alive and kicking – or the **EU SAFA Programme**, as it used to be called.

The RIP is not exclusive to Europe. Your aircraft can be inspected under the program in 49 different countries around the world, including Canada, Morocco, Singapore, and the United Arab Emirates.

Here are the key points:

- Even though it's now called the EU Ramp Inspection Program, ramp inspections for third country operators are still referred to as "SAFA ramp checks". Yeah, it's confusing.
- Ramp checks are possible in every country in the world – but follow a more regulated and common structure in SAFA countries – totalling 49 – see the map and list below.
- There is a **standard checklist** that is used by Inspectors in all SAFA countries, which you should be familiar with – see further down.
- Three categories of findings have been defined. A "**Category 1**" finding is called a minor finding; "**Category 2**" is a significant finding and "**Category 3**" a major finding. The terms "minor", "significant" and "major" relate to the level of influence on safety.
- If there is a "**corrective actions before flight authorised**" finding – then the inspector is concerned and a repair must be made before the aircraft is released to fly.



Unless your aircraft looks like this, you have little to worry about.

Here's how a ramp check normally goes down:

- The flight selected will either be your last of 6 legs for the day, or after a gruelling 12 hour jetlag-inducer, or at 3am when you were thinking about a quick nap during the turnaround. This much is guaranteed.
- As you pull on to the stand, **you will notice more yellow vests than normal hanging around**.
- Two of these will be your friendly ramp inspection team (to be fair, they almost always are)
- A short time later, those yellow vests will be in the cockpit, and the first request will be for a look at your license, medical, aircraft documents (like Insurance, Airworthiness), and flight paperwork. Make sure you've done your fuel checks and there are a few marks on the flight plan.
- If you get a good cop, bad cop scenario, one will disappear down the back (this will be the nice guy) and check the cabin, while the first will stay and ask you tough questions about the TCAS system.
- Some time later, you'll get a list of findings. The average check is probably about 30 minutes.
- You can be guaranteed they will always have at least one finding – which will probably be obscure.
- Sign off the checklist, and you're on your way.

Some interesting points:

- The Inspectors can ask you for manuals, documents, or guidance – but they are not supposed to test your knowledge of procedures, regulations, or technical matters. **This doesn't always happen in practice** – so if you get a tough question – just say "I don't know" – and let them note it if they want to. This isn't a classroom test.
- This guidance is given to Inspectors: Delaying an operator for a non-safety related issue is not only frustrating to the operator, it also could result in unwanted human factor issues with possible negative effects on the flight preparation. **They can (should) only delay your flight**

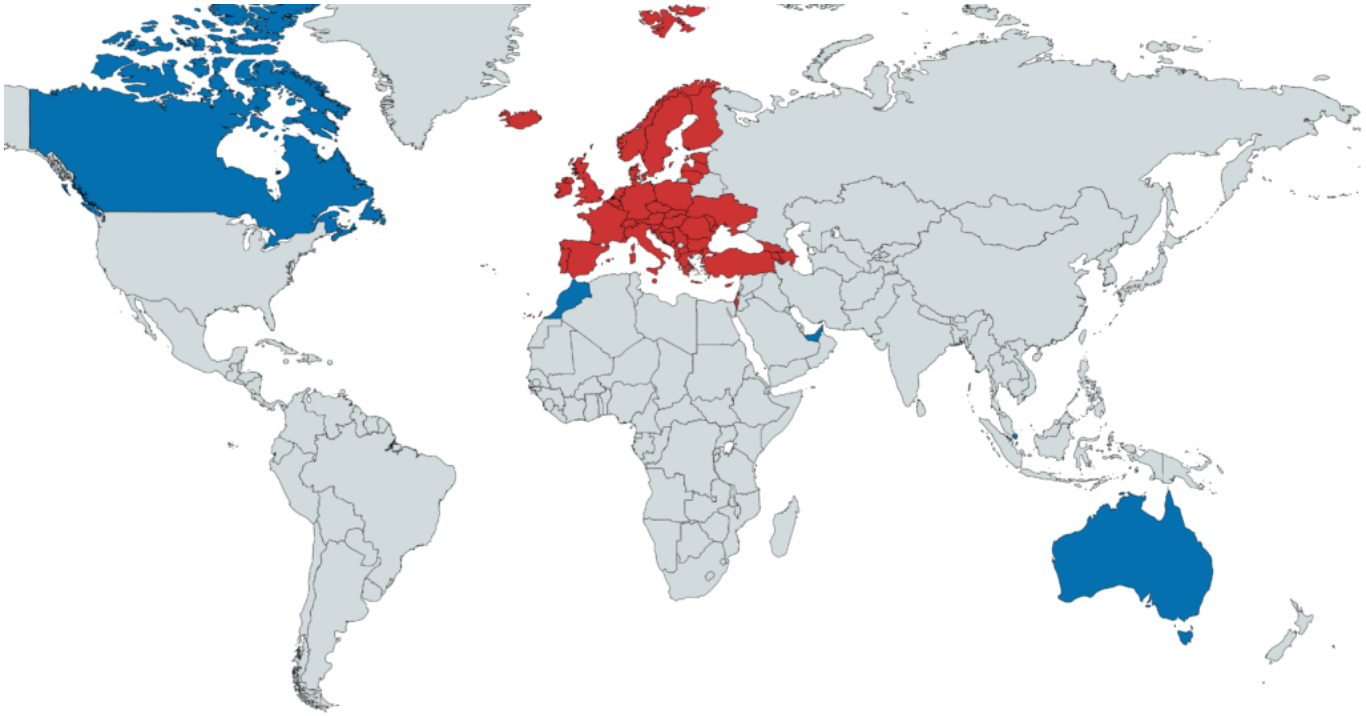
for a safety related issue.

- Remember, it's not you that's being inspected. It's your aircraft. If you're uncomfortable with the questions, get them noted and allow your operator to discuss later.
- **Every inspector is a little different**. Work with them and you'll find that 90% of your ramp checks will be over in 20 minutes with little issue.
- Private Operators – especially in GA (even more so under the 5700kg mark) – are **far less likely to get ramp checked**. EASA guidelines do apply to General Aviation, but they are far more interested in Commercial Operators.
- The items checked during ramp checks are based on a risk based approach and can differ from operator to operator (for example depending on findings raised during previous inspections). Meaning that operators who get ramp checked with findings will most likely **get ramp checked again**, to see if they've sorted out the problems!
- EASA regulations requiring **alcohol testing** during ramp checks will take effect across all SAFA countries in **Aug 2020**. But some countries have already started doing this: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, UK, and Singapore. More info

Common Findings:

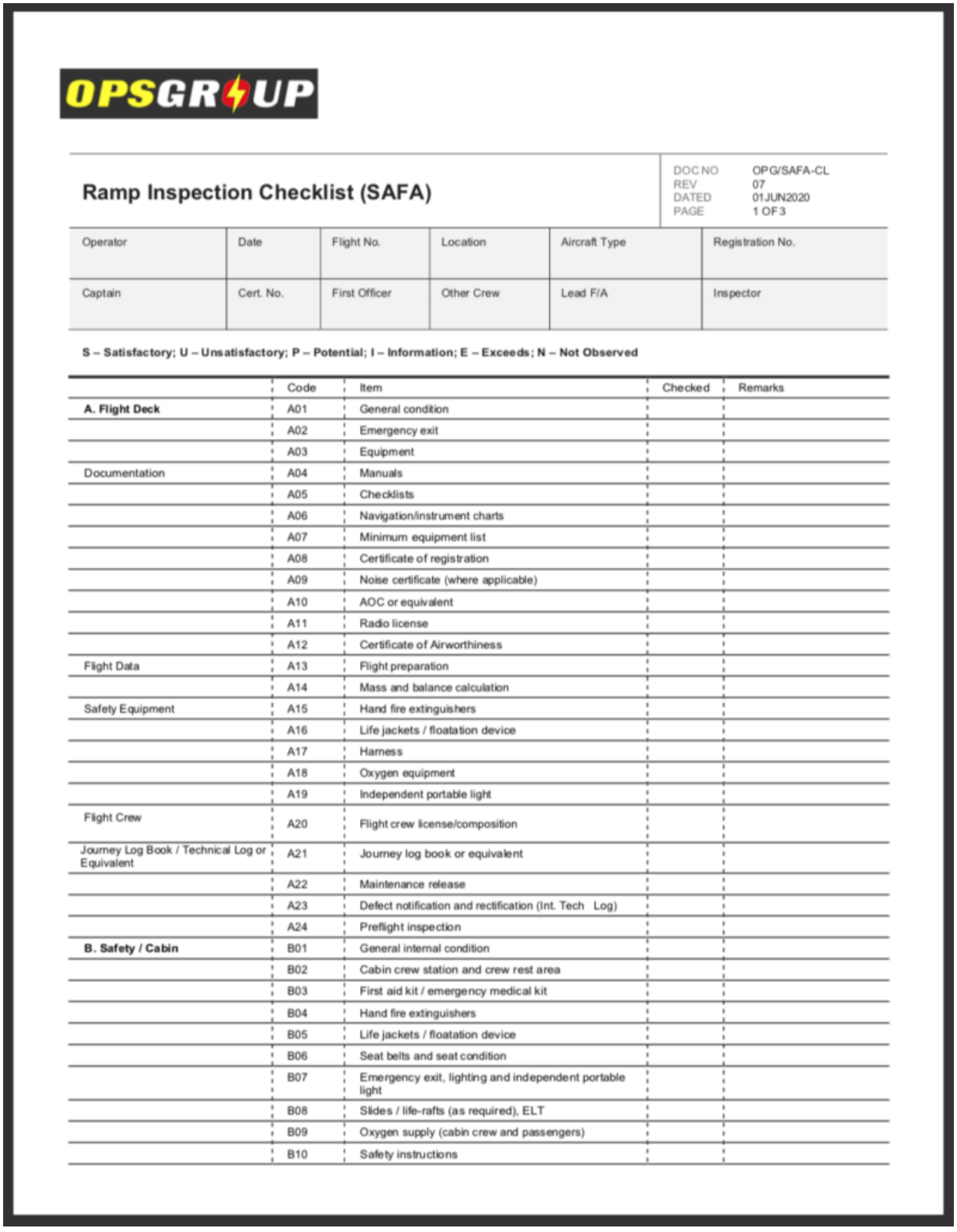
- **Fuel Calculation and Flight Routing:** Alternates must be planned with a SID/STAR routing. In many parts of the world it is common to plan DCT, but not in many European countries. Non-compliance during a ramp inspection could lead to either a Cat 2 finding when sufficient fuel was taken into account such that the required fuel is above the minimum, or a Cat 3 finding when this was not the case.
- **PRNAV/RNAV-1 capability** – non-compliance constitutes a Cat 3 finding when landing at airports (such as EHAM/Amsterdam) that require it. The finding will also be reported to the aeronautical oversight department who can give fines for such violations.
- **Filing incorrect flight plans** – specifically saying you are 8.33 MHz equipped and PRNAV/RNAV-1 capable. Again, this could lead to findings and fines beyond the RIP programme. An easy one to miss.
- **TCAS 7.1** – the TCAS 7.1 requirement became mandatory in EU Airspace from 1st of December 2015 and became a worldwide standard under ICAO from 1st of January 2017. One to also watch out for if operating to EU overseas territories in the Caribbean where this requirement has also been implemented and during ramp inspections is enforced the same way.

The Countries:



The 49 Participating States engaged in the EU Ramp Inspections Programme are:
Europe: Albania, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Republic of Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, The Republic of North Macedonia, Turkey, Ukraine, and United Kingdom.
Rest of world: Canada, Morocco, Singapore, United Arab Emirates.

The Checklist:



OPSGROUP

Ramp Inspection Checklist (SAFA)

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Operator	Date	Flight No.	Location	Aircraft Type	Registration No.
Captain	Cert. No.	First Officer	Other Crew	Lead F/A	Inspector

S – Satisfactory; U – Unsatisfactory; P – Potential; I – Information; E – Exceeds; N – Not Observed

	Code	Item	Checked	Remarks
A. Flight Deck	A01	General condition		
	A02	Emergency exit		
	A03	Equipment		
Documentation	A04	Manuals		
	A05	Checklists		
	A06	Navigation/instrument charts		
	A07	Minimum equipment list		
	A08	Certificate of registration		
	A09	Noise certificate (where applicable)		
	A10	AOC or equivalent		
	A11	Radio license		
	A12	Certificate of Airworthiness		
Flight Data	A13	Flight preparation		
	A14	Mass and balance calculation		
Safety Equipment	A15	Hand fire extinguishers		
	A16	Life jackets / floatation device		
	A17	Harness		
	A18	Oxygen equipment		
	A19	Independent portable light		
Flight Crew	A20	Flight crew license/composition		
Journey Log Book / Technical Log or Equivalent	A21	Journey log book or equivalent		
	A22	Maintenance release		
	A23	Defect notification and rectification (Int. Tech Log)		
	A24	Preflight inspection		
B. Safety / Cabin	B01	General internal condition		
	B02	Cabin crew station and crew rest area		
	B03	First aid kit / emergency medical kit		
	B04	Hand fire extinguishers		
	B05	Life jackets / floatation device		
	B06	Seat belts and seat condition		
	B07	Emergency exit, lighting and independent portable light		
	B08	Slides / life-rafts (as required), ELT		
	B09	Oxygen supply (cabin crew and passengers)		
	B10	Safety instructions		

Download by clicking above, or here: Opsgroup Ramp Checklist

If you want to delve deep into each item on this checklist to find out exactly what inspectors should be looking for, check out this document published by EASA in Sept 2019, which has the inspection instructions in full. For all things Ramp Inspection Program related, check EASA's dedicated webpage here.