



Facts about Aircraft Noise

Complaints about Aircraft Noise

Since the return of demand for air travel in May 2021, the number of local complaints about aircraft noise have increased. The number of commercial flights has not yet fully returned to pre-pandemic levels, but the absence of flights in 2020 may make it seem that noise from aircraft has increased. Flight paths for arrivals and departures from SBA have not changed from those prior to the pandemic. The number of noise complaints has returned to levels similar to 2019 (Year-over-year comparison*):

Year	Month	Number of Complaints
2019	May	536
2020	May	176
2021	May	564

* Note that multiple complaints typically originate from a small number of complainants.

Noise complaints are nearly all related to aircraft arrivals landing in a westerly direction on Runway 25. These are aircraft flying the approach adjacent to Hollister Avenue in Goleta. This landing direction is the predominant approach due to visibility and wind conditions. Normal use is approximately 80% on Runway 25 with the other 20% on Runway 7 in the easterly direction.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) determined noise standards for communities surrounding airports. The measurement used is called the Community Noise Equivalent Level (CNEL) which averages noise levels over 24-hour periods. For more information about federal aircraft noise standards, please see: https://www.faa.gov/regulations_policies/policy_guidance/noise/community/

The threshold for excessive noise is 65 CNEL. By this standard, current data confirms that there are no residential areas near SBA that are subjected to excessive aircraft noise. SBA monitors noise levels using remote noise monitoring equipment and federally-approved metrics generated from computerized noise contours and noise exposure maps.

Approach Flight Paths to SBA

All aircraft on approach in a decent to land at SBA are under the positive control of the FAA Air Traffic Control Tower. Pilots communicate directly with controllers on the ground at SBA. Pilots operate their aircraft at a safe altitude while visually monitoring landing descent progress. The Airport recommends a preferred route for flight arrivals and works to educate airlines about this approach: the **SBA Voluntary Noise Abatement Approach**. The approach deviates from the standard approved approach for landings on Runway 25, because it can reduce the level of perceived aircraft noise. Weather conditions also can affect the range and intensity of noise perceived on the ground.

The voluntary approach routes an aircraft's turn from over the Pacific Ocean to intersect with the open area below known as More Mesa. The approach is voluntary because SBA cannot mandate alternative flight paths for approach and landing than those regulated by the federal government.

The adoption of the federal ***Airport Noise and Capacity Act*** in 1990 prohibited local jurisdictions, such as cities, counties or airports, from adopting local restrictions on aircraft movements in order to avoid aircraft noise. The same legislation also established requirements for the much quieter aircraft engines that are in use today.

Safety First – In the Air and On the Ground

The Pilot-In-Command of an aircraft has the sole authority to determine the safest approach path for landing. An aircraft must have sufficient space to safely slow and descend for landing. The voluntary noise abatement approach can be a challenging approach for some pilots under any number of conditions. Typically, a pilot will position an aircraft for landing at a distance of three (3) to five (5) miles from the threshold of the runway. The voluntary noise abatement approach requires a pilot to turn from the Pacific Ocean and stabilize alignment of the aircraft at approximately two and a half (2.5) miles from the runway. The length of SBA's runway at 6,052 feet also requires a stabilized approach in order to use the limited runway surface for a safe landing and stop. A pilot will only use this approach if it can be done safely above all other considerations. Nearly 25% of commercial airline flights do not currently use the voluntary noise abatement approach due to safety concerns communicated by their Chief Pilot.

The voluntary noise abatement approach is a visual approach that can only be used in good weather conditions or if the aircraft is equipped with an FAA published VOR/GPS approach that can be used when moderate sky cover is in place. This FAA issued VOR/GPS approach path is routed from out over the Pacific Ocean, directly over More Mesa shores. None of SBA's commercial airlines will mandate their pilots to use the voluntary noise abatement approach due to their emphasis on safety as the primary objective. Similarly, the FAA will not allow its air traffic controllers to suggest in any way that the voluntary noise abatement approach is required.

In addition to proper stabilization for landing, there are other safety considerations that may prevent a pilot's use of the voluntary noise abatement approach:

- Delayed transfer from Los Angeles Air Traffic to SBA Air Traffic Control
- Aircraft is too high or cannot slow sufficiently for the approach
- Weather conditions, including excessive wind, low level wind shear or poor visibility
- Bird wildlife in the vicinity
- Cabin not fully prepared for landing (seat backs and tray tables in the upright position)
- Pilot's level of skill, training, or confidence in the approach
- Aircraft spacing as required by the SBA Air Traffic Control Tower
- Air Traffic Control controllers directing aircraft for safety priorities only

The Airport investigates all community noise complaints to determine if the aircraft used the voluntary noise abatement approach. If not, Airport staff examines if there were other factors that could have made the approach unacceptable or unsafe. If no such factors are apparent, the Airport sends a letter to the operator of the aircraft requesting them to use the voluntary noise abatement approach in the future, when it is safe to do so. Local jurisdictions have no authority to issue fines or other corrective actions.

Residents can make a noise complaint by calling (805) 967-1900 or by using the [PublicVue](https://www.flysba.santabarbaraca.gov/about/contact-us/aircraft-noise-advisory-program) portal on the web: <https://www.flysba.santabarbaraca.gov/about/contact-us/aircraft-noise-advisory-program> By using the web-based system, it is possible to be updated on the investigation of the complaint.