

## **Miami Center Veteran Controller Resigns Due to Hostile Work Environment**

Posted on StuckMic by a frustrated veteran air traffic controller at the Miami Air Route Traffic Control Center (ZMA)

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Today Miami Center is operating with 192 fully certified controllers and 84 developmental controllers with operational numbers exceeding 2.5 million aircraft a year, up from only 1.5 million operations 15 years ago. Read the resignation letter from Patrick A. Russo, the most recent Miami Center controller to resign.

For many years the FAA's authorized staffing number for Miami Center was 279 full performance level controllers, a number based on many factors not limited to the number of aircraft and operational positions. That number has now dropped to 197. The FAA attempts to conceal the fact that they cannot attract and keep enough air traffic controllers at Miami Center.

Though it claims that it manages resources better then it did years ago, the better resource management that the FAA refers to translates into mandatory six-day work weeks comprised of 10-hour days for controllers.

Ten years ago, it was unacceptable for an En Route controller to work more than two hours on-position without a break. Now controllers work three hours at a time. Controllers are retiring as soon as they're eligible to do so; they want their lives back. The six-day workweeks, ten-hour days on rotating shifts and the increased stress of working at the highest-performance level without making a mistake has taken its toll on them. Many of them have become so stressed out, fatigued and worried about making a fatal mistake that they have quit rather than run the risk of being the controller on position when an accident occurs.

The trainees being hired are also leaving in record numbers. Their pay has been changed and their working conditions are horrible. Many have left because they feel the same thing that many of controllers do: there is no quick fix to this problem. Two years ago, Miami Center was designated as a Focus Facility by the FAA due to the staffing shortage. Developmental controllers were poured into the facility and the FAA changed their training plan. Many of those developmental controllers have sat for almost two years without any training.

At Miami Center, 17 developmental controllers have resigned since July of last year. There will be 19 controllers eligible to retire at Miami Center at the end of this year, even more next year, and still more until 2011 and beyond. The problems at Miami Center of understaffing and the associated fatigue, increased delays, inadequate training and shrinking safety margins will only continue to get worse for the foreseeable future unless something is done soon to alleviate the situation.