U.S. Department
of Transportation
**Federal Aviation
Administration**

Office of the Chief Counsel

800 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20591

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Bruce A. Chase, Assistant Chief Instructor
School of Aeronautical Science, Flight Department
LeTourneau University
P.O. Box 7001
Longview, TX 75607-7001

Dear Mr. Chase:

This letter is in response to your May 25, 2010 request for interpretation regarding the meaning of "visual approach slope indicator" as referenced in 14 C.F.R. § 91.175(c)(3)(vi). You ask whether the term is specific or whether it would include Precision Approach Path Indicators (PAPI), tri-color visual approach slope indicators, pulsating visual approach slope indicators, or an alignment of elements system.

From your question asking whether the term "visual approach slope indicator" is specific, we infer that you are referring to the lighting aids described in the Aeronautical Information Manual, Section 2-1-2(a), as a type of visual glideslope indicator that provides visual descent guidance information through a series of lights arranged in bars that display red or white lights. *See* FAA, Aeronautical Information Manual, Section 2-1-2(a) (Mar. 10, 2011). In the remainder of this interpretation we will refer to this system as a VASI.

A reason that § 91.175(c)(3) enumerates certain visual references in the runway environment is to ensure that pilots conducting instrument approaches can verify the position of the aircraft when making an instrument approach. *See* 46 Fed. Reg. 2280, 2282 (Jan. 8, 1981) ("Use of [inappropriate] landmarks can result in mistaken identification of position or aircraft flight path."). Further, the preamble to the rule does not indicate an intent to limit the rule to VASI systems. *See* 46 Fed. Reg. 2280; 45 Fed. Reg. 14802 (Mar. 6, 1980).

The FAA interprets "visual approach slope indicator," as used in § 91.175(c)(3)(vi), to include PAPI systems. The rule was implemented before PAPIs were widely used in the national airspace system. However, PAPIs are now used to replace VASIs. *See* FAA, Navigation Services,
http://www.faa.gov/about/office_org/headquarters_offices/ato/service_units/techops/navservices/lsg/papi/ (last viewed August 13, 2010).

Furthermore, PAPIs and VASIs share similar characteristics, including the light units used to project glide path, and the colors (red and white) used to indicate whether an aircraft is above, on, or below glide path. Accordingly, a PAPI is an appropriate item of reference for the purposes contemplated by the regulation.

Similarly, the FAA would consider tri-color visual approach slope indicators, pulsating visual approach slope indicators and alignment of elements systems as appropriate items of reference. All are types of visual glide slope indicators, appear on U.S. Terminal Procedures Charts where applicable, and are therefore identifiable to the pilot. As such, these systems may serve as visual references for pilots when determining whether to descend below decision altitude (DA), decision height (DH), or minimum descent altitude (MDA), when using the provisions of § 91.175(c)(3).

We note that this interpretation would also apply to the use of "visual approach slope indicator" in § 121.651.

This response was prepared by Dean Griffith, Attorney, and Robert Frenzel, Manager, Operations Law Branch in the Regulations Division of the Office of the Chief Counsel, and was coordinated with the Air Transportation Division, Flight Technologies and Procedures Division, and General Aviation and Commercial Division of Flight Standards Service. Please contact us at (202) 267-3073 if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

Rebecca B. MacPherson
Assistant Chief Counsel for Regulations, AGC-200