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

Office of the Chief Counsel

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

JAN 20 2012

Mr. Thomas Knauff
Knauff & Grove, Inc
3523 South Eagle Valley Road
Julian, PA 16844

Dear Mr. Knauff,

This letter is in response to your July 19, 2011 request for a legal interpretation regarding altimeter settings required in 14 CFR § 91.121. In your letter, you state that there is confusion among local area glider pilots as to whether altimeters must be set to mean sea level (MSL) when not using a cruising altitude, such as when conducting student glider flight training. Additionally, you indicate that glider operators are unsure if the regulation requires altimeters to be set to mean sea level (MSL) or above ground level (AGL) during student training and local flying.

The cruising altitude of an aircraft below 18,000 feet MSL shall be maintained by reference to an altimeter that is set to the current reported altimeter setting of a station located along the route of flight and within 100 nautical miles of the aircraft. If there is no such station, the current reported altimeter setting of an appropriate available station shall be used. In an aircraft having no radio, the altimeter shall be set to the elevation of the departure airport or an appropriate altimeter setting available before departure. 14 CFR § 91.121(a)(1).

The cruising altitude is the MSL altitude or flight level maintained during en route level flight. For aircraft such as gliders, transient periods of time at a particular altitude do not relieve pilots from the requirements to operate the aircraft in reference to an altimeter that is set according to the requirements of § 91.121(a). Thus, local area glider pilots must set their altimeters to MSL, not AGL, during glider operations, including student glider training flights.

Further FAA guidance on altimeter settings for glider operations can be found in the Glider Flying Handbook, FAA-H-8083-13, Chapter 4 (available online at http://www.faa.gov/library/manuals/aircraft/glider_handbook/media/faa-h-8083-13.pdf).

We appreciate your patience and trust that the above responds to your concerns. This response was prepared by Nancy Sanchez, an attorney in the Regulations Division of the

Office of the Chief Counsel, and was coordinated with the General Aviation and Commercial Division of Flight Standards. 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