

## AVSIM Commercial FS9 Utility Review

# *Real Environment XTreme FS2004*



### Product Information

**Publishers:** [Real Environment Xtreme](#)

**Description:** Environmental enhancement package for FS9.

**Download Size:**  
926 MB + 7 MB Patch

**Format:**  
Download

**Simulation Type:**  
FS9

**Reviewed by:** [Philip Wilson](#) AVSIM Staff Reviewer - February 14, 2010

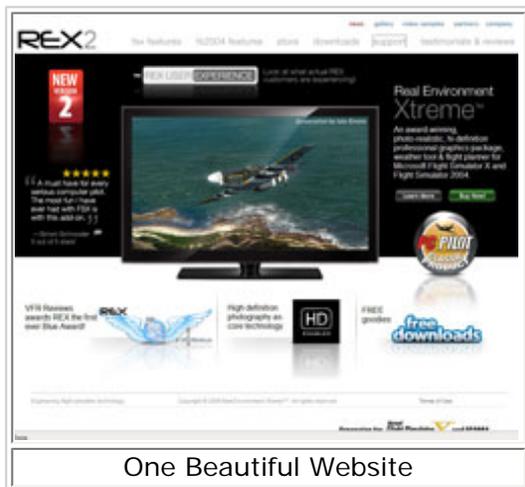
## Introduction

Sometimes you just know. Walk up to a BMW M5, Mercedes Benz AMG65 or similar class of vehicle and you feel it

before you even touch the door. Years ago I owned an amazing Audi A6 Bi-Turbo and even before I drove the car, I knew. The designers did it right. Then as you slide into the driver's seat, that tingling sensation runs down your spine. You just know it will take months to wipe the smile off your face.

## Enter Real Environment Xtreme for FS2004.

From the first time I visited the Rex2 website, I knew the product would be exceptional. From a marketing standpoint, their website is among the best I've ever seen, and having developed commercial websites myself, I definitely know what to look for. I consciously critique every website I visit and no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't find a single element of their website that wasn't flawless given their intended goal.



In an effort to describe what REX FS2004 is and does, I tried to come up with a coherent and accurate description. Unfortunately nothing I came up with even comes close to the introduction the manual provides, which says:

*"REX is a full weather environment creation, display, and manipulation program which includes a robust selection of beautiful user or automatically selectable sky, cloud themes and other environment textures, real world and custom weather generators, and real time weather reporting & updating.*

*A feature that stands out is the automatic selection of real time, real world textures based on the actual weather at the arrival and departure airports. In addition, REX allows you to control many of the FS9 water textures and effects, airport environment textures, sun textures, and lighting effects that are so critical to the enjoyment of and immersion in the flight simulator experience.*

*Finally, REX also has full flight planning and in-flight weather monitoring tools to enhance the realism. All of these features can be fully manipulated to your individual taste."*

WOW! Now that's what I call an introduction.

The most well respected and successful CEO's in the world will tell you hiring the right people for any given area of responsibility is paramount in their company's success. The REX design team is a group of highly skilled professionals, each a leader in their chosen field. There are five team members outlined on the REX [company page](#), and it is important to bring you excerpts from their individual bio's as it will definitely reflect the level of professionalism this company brings to the table.

### Tim Fuchs - Developer, Lead Artistic & Texture Development

*"Tim is a multi degree-level fine artist disciplined in computer graphics as well as natural media. He comes from a working background, and contributed his talents to some of the largest companies in the world, including Adobe Systems, Motorola, FOX Entertainment Group and AlliedSignal Aerospace. Tim continues to devote quality artistic work and strives for realism and excellence in every texture he creates. As you can see from his work on X Graphics or his award-winning freeware application for FS9, Real Environment Professional, the level of commitment to enhancing the Flight Simulator environment is unsurpassed. Tim brings to REX a pinpoint vision of accurate environment representation and the quality inherent in this package is a true testament of his dedication."*

### Reed Stough - Systems Developer

*"Reed brings to the REX team over 10 years experience in computer programming, business analysis and project management. He also brings a unique perspective in the area of Meteorology in which since he was a kid, has been fascinated with the dynamics of weather and storms. He has worked for the National Weather Service and back when he lived in Indiana he used to chase thunderstorms and tornadoes as a storm spotter. Reed has written papers for college credit in regards to how to forecast thunderstorm outbreaks and severe weather events. He became fascinated with Microsoft's Flight Simulator since version 5 and had a vision to make the weather a more dominant feature of the simulation. Thus, Reed developed the Weather Maker product line of weather engines since version 2002, and has been one of the leading forces in the industry in pushing the development to new levels. He is determined to bring the most realistic experience in weather to all flight simulator enthusiasts."*

## Bill Collins - Texture Artist

*"Bill continues to shock and awe with every engaging texture he creates. Coming from Foundation 9 Entertainment, Bill understands the necessity for realism in graphics production. He is a member of the International Game Developers Association and has accumulated countless awards on many big name titles."*

## Chan Raiu - GUI Programmer

*"Chan heads up the GUI development with an intricate eye for detail. He brings to REX over 15 years of high level programming expertise and systems analysis, and has worked alongside Mr. Fuchs on many known projects for Adobe Systems and Motorola."*

## Stephen Lyon (CFI-PPL) - Photographer/Pilot/Marketing Consultant

*"Mr. Lyon's work is viewed worldwide, from as far back as 20+ years as a professional photographer for clients ranging from Pepsi to the Ford Motor Company. His talents for the 'shutter' never cease to amaze. In 1999 he received his PPL and had expanded his focus to not only product photography, but nature. His exceptional work on Real Environment Xtreme™ is evident every time you look above. All skies in REX have been shot from his lens, as well as most of the cloud types. Mr. Lyon also brings to the table 25+ years marketing experience and manages his ad agency on a daily basis."*

When you are looking at REX for the first time, there is little doubt it took a group of highly experienced artists like the ones above to accomplish everything REX brings to the FS2004 community.

One final note about the developer. I have corresponded with Tim Fuchs numerous times during this review process. I can't think of many people as genuinely down to earth as he is. It is always a pleasure to hear from him and he addresses people with the utmost respect and honesty. If even half of the people we communicate with on a daily basis were such a pleasure to talk to, the world would be a much better place.

It is extremely important to add some perspective here. I am a Flight Simulation scenery fanatic. I own UTX, GEX, FEX, REX2, UT(FS9), FSScene (USA for FSX and FS9), Ground Environment (FS9), just to name a **FEW**. It should be obvious I don't/can't use them all at the same time, but in an effort to generate the most realistic scenery available, I buy everything that comes down the proverbial road. As a scenery (environmental) product for FS9, it was very difficult to keep an open mind given the limitations of that version of Flight Simulator. When I would criticize something during testing, often it was a result of what FS9 could and could not do.

Given my initial enthusiasm, I assure you, I will give you a comprehensive and honest review on this product.

## Installation and Documentation

I recommend visiting the REX FS2004 [product page](#) before purchase as it is an excellent guide to "What you get". We will go over that in a bit.

When you click Buy Now, you are taken to FlightSimStore.com to complete your transaction. I should note, if you haven't decided to purchase yet, the FlightSimStore.com [product page](#) has several images to further entice you. If you haven't purchased from them before, you must create an account, then on to actually purchasing the product. After downloading the file you are emailed the authorization information to activate REX and away you go.

Installation is easy and straightforward. When you first run REX it will guide you through several pages where you locate the root FS9 folder, backup your original textures and select various configuration settings. From there you are taken to the Options screen where you select various items such as cloud and water themes, types of runways and taxiways, cloud resolution and lighting to name a few.

Test System
Dell XPS720 DuoCore2.66MHz 4Gb RAM 667MHz nVidia 9800GTX+512M SB X-Fi Extreme Music CH Fighterstick, Yoke, Throttles and Rudder FEX, UTX, GEX
<b>Flying Time:</b> 25 hours



The REX Configuration Manager

The REX Options screen

The installation process also includes setting up the REX WASys weather avoidance system. The REX manual states:

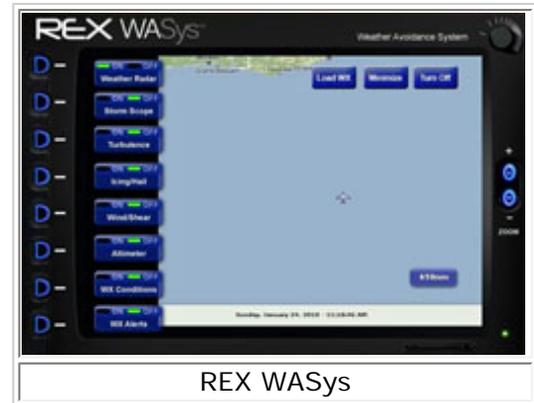
*"The Weather Avoidance System (WASys) and is one of the most important and extensively used screens in the entire REX program. This system allows you to follow the weather along the flight path in real time as well as allowing you to directly interface with the weather engine."*

The WASys tool is a very cool feature both aesthetically and functionally. It mimics an onboard weather radar system and brings an amazing level of realism to the cockpit. I'll go into this program in more detail a little further into this review.

Once the entire REX FS2004 program is installed, users should download and install a 7MB critical patch which can be found in their REX 2004 [support section](#) of the REX website. What the patch addresses is clearly outlined on the link I provided above.

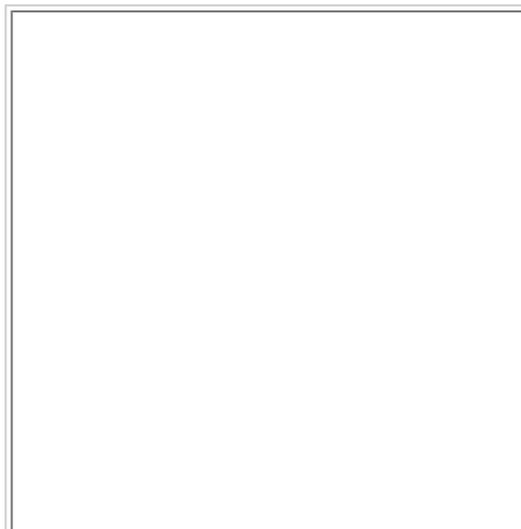
Once installed, you will find several new items in your start menu. From the Real Environment Xtreme 2004 folder you will see the following links:

- Check for updates
- REX 2004 PDF Manual
- REX.exe
- REX Support
- Weather Engine
- Uninstall



REX WASys

The sole document is a 10MB 68 page PDF manual, exceptional in quality, clarity and ease of understanding. It is extremely well written with attention to detail and images galore.





REX FS2004 Manual

(**Reviewers note:** Throughout this review I will occasionally use text from the manual where it is appropriate. The only text used will be where the manual describes a feature or function in detail and rewriting it would take from the full description. The text, where it is used, will be italicized.)

## User Interface and Textures

The user interface (GUI) and texture areas of the REX FS2004 product warrant a dedicated section in this review.

The REX GUI is by far one of the highest quality programs I've ever come across, even outside the flight simulation world. I literally have 100+ commercial add-ons for FSX and FS9; dozens of industry standard professional video editing and graphic design programs, and have seen a plethora of user interfaces in recent years.

From a developer's point of view, the REX GUI is nearly flawless. There are a few areas where you are required to save a configuration, even if you didn't make any changes, but given the complexity of the program, there was no other alternative. I commend the REX team on raising the bar that all current and future environmental add-ons will be measured by.

Creating the environmental, water and ground textures (runway and taxiway) for REX fs2004 was approached with the highest possible quality in mind. The website states:

*"REX is a technologically & artistically advanced, hi-definition texture utility for the simulator pilot who requires a more advanced feature set. The content is produced from extremely hi-resolution film photography, NOT digital, with the upmost artistic attention to detail. Source material is then laser drum-scanned and our proprietary artwork and textures are maintained in hi-definition format to allow its amazing detail and clarity to become evident within the simulation environment."*

Again, given the experience level of the REX team, there was no compromising on quality here.

## REX FS2004

The REX FS2004 product page outlines what features this title offers.

- User-friendly intuitive and visually pleasing interface
- **NEW** - Full-featured NEW built-in Weather Engine (Built on Real Life meteorological algorithms using synoptic, meso-scale, and micro environment weather formulas for Real and Custom weather)
- **NEW** - Flight Planner (Ability to create and file a Flight Plan using true to life flight requirements)

- **NEW** - New feature never before seen in FS2004. Sky coloring now reflects on all water surfaces during dawn and dusk hours.
- Hi-definition, ultra-realistic photo-real 3D clouds (stratus, wispy, cumulus and highly realistic rendering of cirrus clouds as seen in the real world)
- Sky color environments (Includes smoothing horizon transition & visibility smoothing for dawn, day, dusk & night)
- Convincingly real water environments with tropical reef simulation (end user color controllable, including tropical with reef simulations, inland and ocean, wave turbulence/frequency, environment variants & coloring.
- Airport environments (photo-real asphalt & concrete runway textures, new runway and ground bump-mapping, asphalt taxiways, concrete taxiways, realistic taxiway markings, airport signage and general photorealistic airport ground scenery)
- Multiple variations of sun, lens flare & brand NEW lightning bolt algorithms, which creates a visually stunning array of lightning situations
- Fully integrated to select Sky, Cloud, Water, Airport, and Effect Themes based upon weather situation, season, and other synoptic, meso-scale, and micro weather conditions
- Enhanced Cloud Simulation to give a more 3D volumetric feel to cloud structures and the atmosphere
- Lighting environments (runway lighting including simulated ground glow, stunningly realistic aircraft spotlights with variations for small to large aircraft, aircraft strobe lights, variations for add-on aircraft as well)
- 3d cloud & water resolution options for performance preference
- Flexibility to work in tandem with other vendor weather & texture packages

Following the successful installation and configuration of REX FS2004 you are presented with the Main Menu screen. From here you are only limited by your imagination as to the number of environmental scenery combinations available for FS2004.

I would like to point out a defining design element here. The page layout was developed to flow with the natural course of flight planning, and the addition of the three prominently displayed Quick Start buttons only enhances the ease of use. Although self explanatory, the Quick start buttons perform the following functions:

1. Just fly, without the need to perform any actions. REX will select all texture themes at random, download real weather or custom build the weather, depending on what you choose, install the weather textures needed for the particular weather conditions, generate a flight plan, and start FS2004.
2. I like to Create-Create custom texture themes, but allow REX to accomplish all other tasks.
3. I want to follow a flight plan-Create a flight plan but allow REX to accomplish all other tasks.



The REX FS2004 Main Screen

Additionally you can access any of the REX sub-menus that will allow complete customization and manipulation via a row of tabs across the top of the user interface. The flight planner can import flight plans created in FS2004, flight plans created by REX previously, as well as import flight plans from some of the more popular third party flight planning tools available on the market.

From the Main Menu page, the top navigation bar consists of nine tabs; Main, Theme Creation, Flight Planner, Weather, Fly Now!, Options, Configuration Manager, Help and About REX. We will go through each page here giving you an idea of what to expect from this product. Below I'll give you some screenshots of various pages.



Theme Creation Page



Flight Planner Page



Weather selection box

REX About page

**The Theme Creation** page is where the real fun begins. There are nine active and one "coming soon" boxes; Sky Theme, Cloud Theme, Inland Water, Ocean Water, Tropical Water, Waves, Runway/Taxiway, Taxiway Markings, Sun/Lighting, Effects/Sounds(not available yet).

As the name suggests, each box is a portal to an amazing array of selections within that element. For instance, choosing the Sky Theme box opens a page where you can select from 20 sunrise, 59 daytime and 15 sunset sky themes. These are the sky textures only and don't include the exponential number of cloud texture combinations which are available and selected from the Cloud Theme box. Remember that after you have selected your favorite textures, you will need to click on the Save button for that screen.



Orchard Sunrise Set

There are 20 Sunrise selections

Now that we've chosen our sky textures, it's time to add some clouds. REX FS2004 offers HD cloud textures, and in FS9, that means 1024x1024. From the Options screen you can select 512x512 textures for higher performance at the cost of quality.

The Cloud Theme box offers 57 different 3D cloud sets and 22 Cirrus cloud sets. For those of you who love a challenge, try calculating the number of combinations available thus far. Let's see...57 3D cloud sets, 22 Cirrus cloud sets, each available on 20 sunrises, 59 daytime and 15 sunset sky textures. We haven't even started talking about the Weather Engine.



Cloud selection page

Even the loading screen is beautiful

The next few boxes are for water textures; Inland water, Ocean water and Tropical water. One nice feature on all water textures is the ability to easily change the saturation, plankton, brightness and contrast of the textures with sliders on each dedicated page.

Similar to the sky and cloud themes, there are multiple selections available, Inland water textures consist of 10 blue and 10 brown variations, where Ocean water textures have 10 sets and Tropical offers 15 different texture sets. While we're on the subject of water, it is only natural to add the Waves theme box here. There are 9 different wave animation themes, and when added to any of the water texture sets, will give a never ending supply of water scenery to chose from.



Inland water textures

Ocean water textures

Nine separate wave choices available

The next two boxes on our Theme Selection page are the Runway/Taxiway and Taxiway marking boxes. As you have already surmised, they are for the named textures. I have seen a lot of freeware runway and taxiway textures and markings, and many were very well done. These textures as created by the REX team are breathtakingly realistic. You almost feel as you could run your fingers over the concrete taxiways and feel the oil and grime from years of use. You are offered both asphalt and concrete textures on the taxiways and runways.

You can select from:

- Asphalt runway = 12 texture sets
- Asphalt Taxiways = 26 texture sets
- Concrete Runways = 13 texture sets
- Concrete taxiways = 27 texture sets
- Taxiway markings = 5 sets

Any way you look at it, a large selection of textures to choose from.



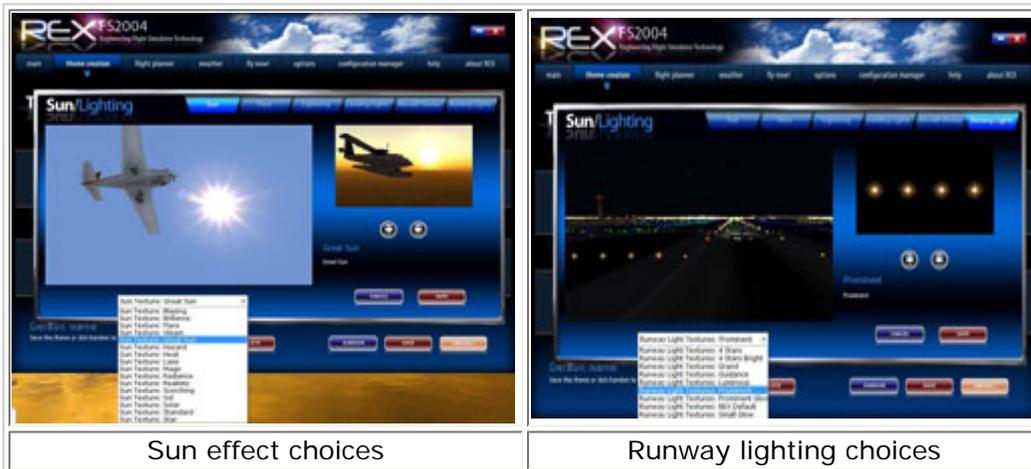
Asphalt runway #3

Concrete runway #9

Fresh taxiway marks

Scuffed taxiway marks

And finally we have the Sun/Lighting box. This area gives you control over Sun, Flare, Lightening, Landing Lights, Aircraft Strobe, and Runway Light textures. With various selectable options for each item, you can tailor the sun and lighting to your own taste.



Sun effect choices

Runway lighting choices

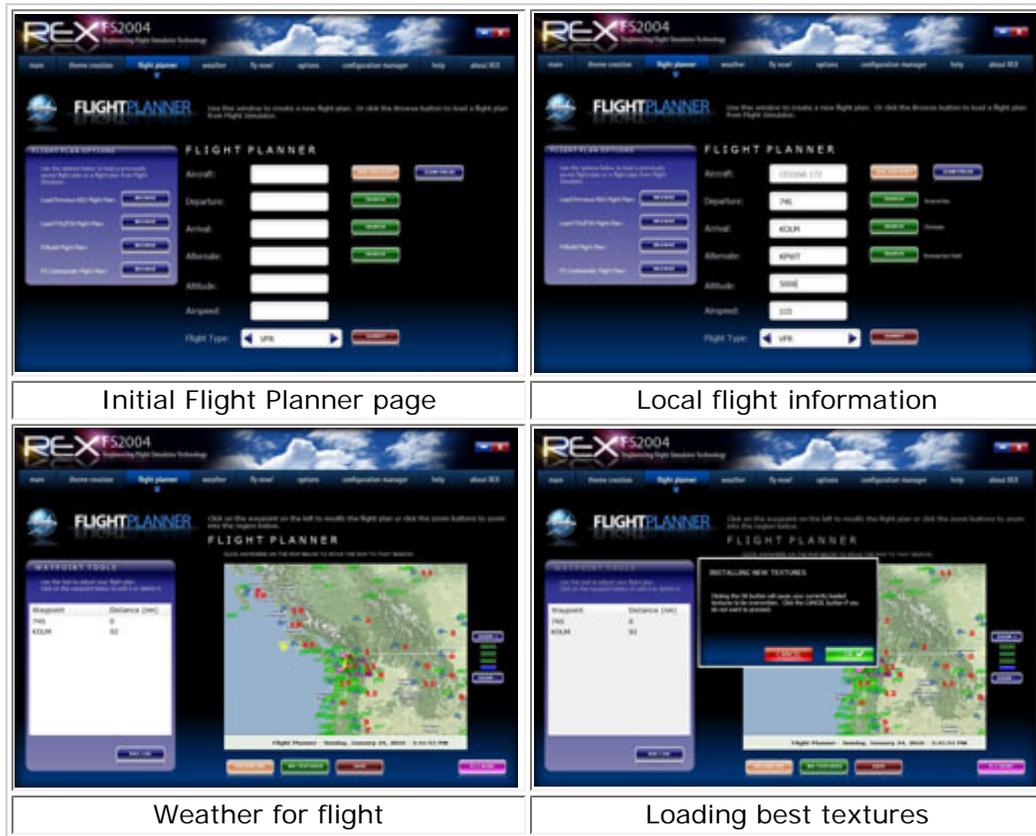
## Flight Planner

The flight planner is used when you desire to create or import an existing flight plan, review the weather along the route, and review and print out nav logs, flight plans, and weather logs. Use the capabilities of REX to examine this weather and carefully choose and install into FS2004 the textures that best represent the weather in the area you wish to fly.

A highly powerful tool, the flight planner is invaluable to creating the most realistic flight environment experience in FS9. When you first select the Flight Planner tab, it will prompt you to select real-time, random, or archived weather. For the sake of this review, we'll choose real-time weather.

After the weather we are asked for the basic flight information such as aircraft type, departure arrival and alternate airports, altitude, speed, and flight rules (VFR-IFR). The built in database has every aircraft type imaginable and it

associated cruise speed. Being forward thinkers, the REX team allows you to add aircraft to the database and edit the cruise speed of every aircraft available.



After you enter your flight information and click submit, the Flight Planner creates the flight. Here we find another very cool feature. Since REX FS2004 knows the weather for your flight, it prompts you to have it automatically install the best texture sets based on the current weather across your flight path. I highly recommend doing this because from my experience with this product, it hasn't been wrong yet.

From the loaded flight planner page you can edit waypoints, view and print navigation and weather logs, and after you are completely satisfied with everything, click on the Fly Now button to start the flight.

I do need to mention the loading process here. When you click the Fly Now button, it will minimize the REX program, start the WESys program and start FS9. If you have a complex flight plan, the programs need a bit of time to load everything completely. From FS9 you then select your departure airport and aircraft and then verify the weather tab in FS9 automatically changes to User Defined Weather.

Then click Fly Now from FS9 and off you go.

## Support

Customer Support is one area I critique closely. The manner in which a company treats their customers is a direct reflection on the character of the company.

One global computer manufacturer sold an astronomical number of extremely high-end computers (\$4,000 to \$7,000), and had thousands of motherboards fail. Most systems under warranty were repaired using the same motherboard and when those systems failed again right out of factory warranty, the company cut the customers loose.

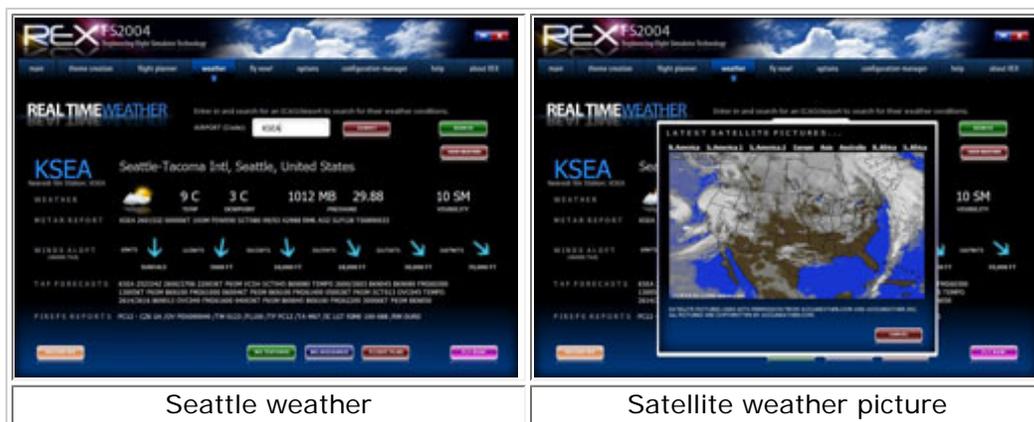
A factory replacement motherboard was \$400+, but they were so limited in number, many users pulled out what they could save and scrapped the systems. This is firsthand knowledge and the sting of a \$5,500 paperweight is still felt. This my friends is why I spend so much emphasis on great customer service.

Fear not as the REX team places customer service near the top of their priority list. Following the initial release of REX FS2004, there were several customers who experienced problems. The support team halted all development on other projects and worked tirelessly until the patch could be uploaded. There are even a few more surprise additions coming soon.

## The Weather page

The first type of weather data is real time weather, familiar to most FS2004 users as real-world weather. This is a real-time download of all the metars and weather data available over the whole globe from the NOAA servers as well as TAFs and pilot reports submitted by pilots all over the world. If you selected **ENABLE VATSIM WEATHER** in the **CONFIGURATION MANAGER** page, then the data that's available will be retrieved from the VATSIM network servers. This option is selected by placing a bullet in use real-time weather and then selecting **OK**. Pressing **CANCEL** returns to the main menu. Once the weather has finished downloading, the main **WEATHER** page appears.

This page has a place to type in the name of an airport, a **SUBMIT** button, and **SEARCH** button in the upper part of the screen. To retrieve the weather, type in the ICAO code for the airport, or search for it with the **SEARCH** button and click **SUBMIT**. The weather data appears in the middle of the screen and there are 4 buttons along the bottom of the screen; **RELOAD WX** button, which forces a re-download of the weather data, **WX TEXTURES** button, which allows the program to choose the best textures to represent the weather, **WX AVOIDANCE** button, which brings up the **WASys** menu, **FLIGHT PLAN** button which displays the **FLIGHT PLANNER**, and a **FLY NOW!** button, which starts the flight.



In the images above you can see the visual depiction of the weather in Seattle, and the available satellite imagery covering the whole world. Viewing the satellite picture, you can choose N. America, S. America1, S. America2, Europe, Asia, Australia, N. Africa and S. Africa. It almost as fun to play with this page as it is to use the flight planner.

The Random Weather screen allows for some very interesting weather manipulation results. The manual describes snow in Hawaii as a possibility. Sounds like fun. When describing the Random Weather page, I couldn't think of anything as well written as the manuals description, so without further ado:

This screen is characterized by two halves; the left half which contains the steps needed to create random weather and the right hand side, which contains the map showing the generated weather as well as the **WX TEXTURES**, **WX AVOIDANCE**, **FLIGHT PLAN**, and **FLY NOW!** buttons.

There are two steps to generating random weather. A location in the form of an airport needs to be specified. This is done in Step 1 via the **Select Weather Region** window. Type in the ICAO code of the airport or use the **SEARCH** button and search for it. Next, the weather generator needs to know what kind of weather you desire. This is achieved by selecting the season desired in the **SEASON** box and by selecting the severity of weather desired in the **SEVERITY** box. The next step is to actually generate the weather. This is where the fun begins. Figures 43-45 below show three examples with KLAX as the **AIRPORT**, **WINTER** as the season and **SEVERE** as the severity. These three were obtained by clicking three successive times on the **GENERATE** button.

The **Fly Now!** tab is the link between the REX FS2004 add-on and the FS2004 program. I will rely heavily on the manual here for the most accurate description of the Fly Now! and WASys features. The loading procedure and WASys are relatively complex actions/features and inadvertently leaving anything out would be an injustice to the REX team.

Anytime **FLY NOW!** is pressed, whether it be from the **MAIN** menu (**fly now!** tab), or from one of the other submenus, REX is given the instruction to start its protocol. Most users are going to check the **Enable Auto Launch REX Weather Engine**, **Enable Auto Launch Flight Simulator**, and **Minimize REX when Flight Simulator Started** options. FS2004 will immediately start, a few seconds later the REX weather engine will start as evidenced by the appearance of the WASys screen, and the REX GUI will switch to the **MAIN** menu and minimize to the taskbar. If some or all of the options above are not checked, you will have to manually start FS2004 and/or the REX weather engine, and manually minimize the REX GUI to the taskbar.

When the weather engine is first started, the screen shown will appear. This is the Weather Avoidance System (WASys) and is one of the most important and extensively used screens in the entire REX program. This system allows you to follow the weather along the flight path in real time as well as allowing you to directly interface with the weather engine.

The screen above shows the weather engine waiting to download weather. This is a very important screen and so it is worthwhile to spend a few minutes learning about it. Note that there are 8 buttons along the left hand side, 2 zoom buttons with a + and - label on the right hand side and 3 buttons along the top, as well as a download progress bar in the center.



WASys loading screen

The buttons we'll discuss now are the three on top. **LOAD WX**-allows you to force the weather engine to download and inject fresh weather and is what's used to start the weather download and injection process if the weather engine is started manually. **MINIMIZE**-allows you to drop the WASys screen down to an icon that will reside in the right hand corner of your system taskbar where clicking on this icon brings the WASys screen back. **TURN OFF**-shuts off the weather engine and the WASys screen, a handy feature if the weather engine needs to be turned off or stopped and restarted for some reason. The WASys screen can be moved around your desktop screen by grabbing it with the mouse and moving it to any location you desire. It cannot be re-sized however at this time.

Once FS2004 has loaded a flight, the weather engine will take a few minutes downloading, processing and injecting the weather into FS2004 after which the WASys map appears on the screen. The download progress can be viewed via the progress bar in the center of the screen.

Note that along the left-hand side next to the 8 buttons are now interface displays that describe what each button's function is. In the center is a map and in the middle of the map is an aircraft symbol that indicates where your aircraft is currently located. This map will move as the flight is underway. The map can also be zoomed in and out. The current level of zoom is indicated by the distance label at the bottom right hand corner of the map. The zoom level goes from 650 nm to 65 nm in four increments. The current date and time is displayed along the bottom of the map.

## Gallery

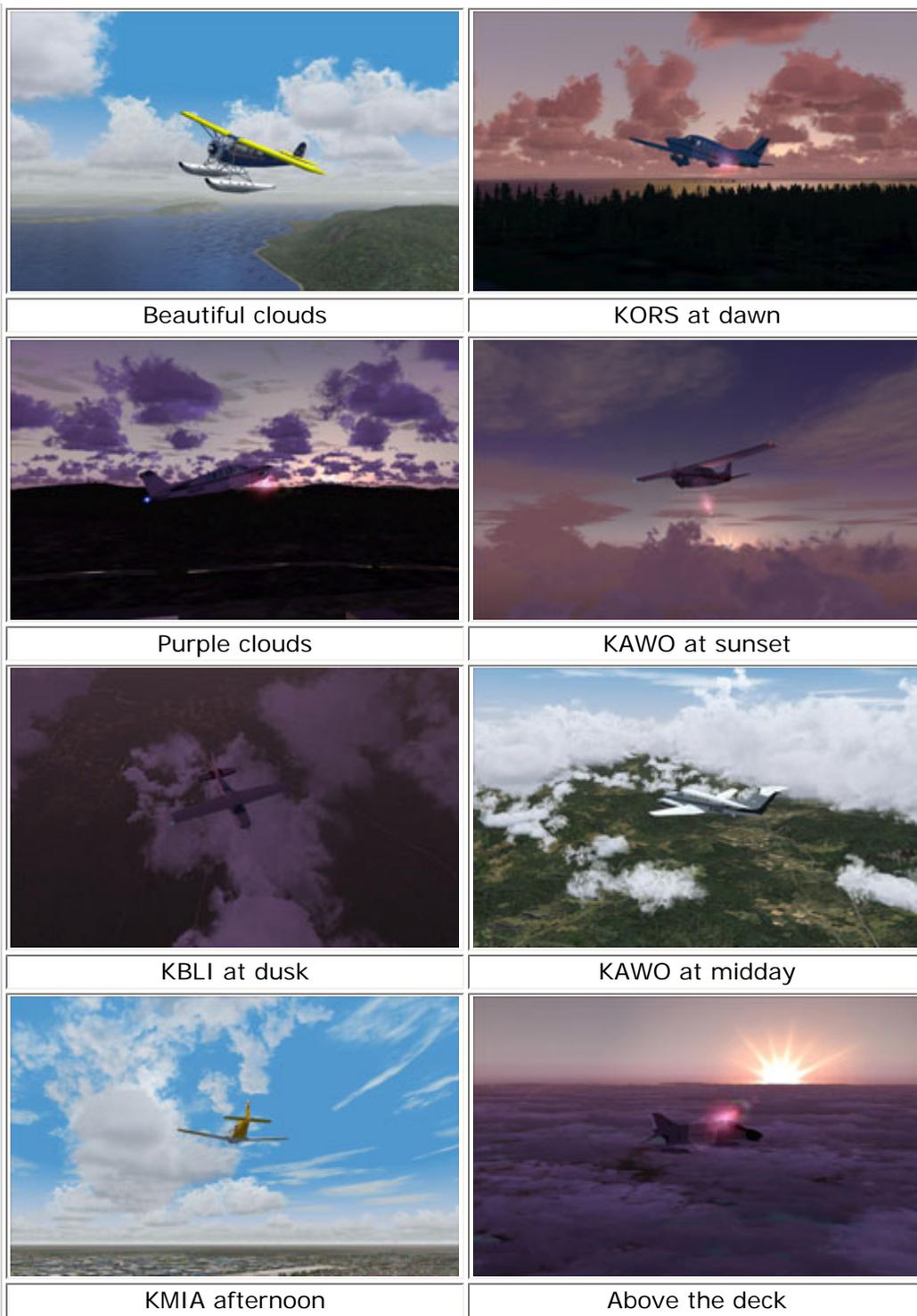
In this section I'll take everything we've learned about this program so far and create a few screenshots showing what's possible. Keep in mind as you view these images...**this is FS 2004!**



Concrete taxiway textures



Asphalt runway textures



## Summary / Closing Remarks

There are currently no other environmental products on the market which even come close to the level of quality and professionalism REX brings to FS2004. For many, FS9 is their only flight simulation option due to the steep system requirements for FSX.

If you fall into that category, I highly recommend this product as it will give you breathtaking and realistic environmental textures, exceeding even the stock FSX textures in beauty and realism.

### **What I Like About Real Environment Xtreme 2004**

- Extremely professional design
- Very easy to use and understand
- Amazing Textures!
- Unlimited environmental combinations
- Powerful and innovative weather tools
- Fair price
- Excellent technical support
- Completely transforms the FS9 flight, water and airport ground environments

### **What I Don't Like About Real Environment Xtreme 2004**

- Not one single thing

### **Printing**

If you wish to print this review or read it offline at your leisure, right click on the link below, and select "save as"

**[Real Environment Xtreme 2004](#)**

[\(adobe acrobat required\)](#)

### **Comments?**

#### **Standard Disclaimer**

The review above is a subjective assessment of the product by the author. There is no connection between the product producer and the reviewer, and we feel this review is unbiased and truly reflects the performance of the product in the simming environment as experienced by the reviewer. This disclaimer is posted here in order to provide you with background information on the reviewer and any presumed connections that may exist between him/her and the contributing party.

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