



## Safety sense leaflet

### Introduction

Most accidents are the result of the pilots actions. This includes their skill level and most important of all, **the decisions that they make**. This leaflet details some of the factors that can affect how the pilots decisions do - or don't - keep him/her in one piece.

### 1. TO FLY OR NOT TO FLY?

Probably the single most important factor in flight safety is the decision of a pilot to begin, or continue flying in unsuitable conditions. As you might expect, weather has been a factor in fatal accidents when the pilot continued to fly in worsening conditions, or did not appreciate the actual effects of the conditions.

Strong wind landings of course don't always result in fatalities, but they still feature highly in broken equipment and painful injuries.

Wind and weather does not stay constant, it doesn't always do what the forecast predicts and it can deteriorate very fast. Respect the weather, and the implications for flight safety. That doesn't just mean **other** less experienced people who can't fly so well are the ones who should respect the weather, **it means you!**

### 2. I CAN'T LAND NOW!

Wind and weather can and will change during the day. It is essential that a pilot is prepared and willing to land if conditions deteriorate. It does not reflect badly on your ability as a pilot if you turn back or land. In fact, it reflects **good judgement and realistic assessment of the situation**. It is also important that a landing is feasible at your chosen spot. **Never** put yourself in a position where you would not feel able and willing to turn back or land if necessary. Make sure you have your wallet and some cash so you're not pressured into landing somewhere you don't want to.

### 3. CHAIN OF EVENTS

In flying accidents, it is common to find a chain of events where one shortcut or poor judgement leads to another. For example, the apparent cause of the accident was a landing in a boulder field in a tight valley. Consider why they chose to land there- was it really an isolated bad judgement or could it have been due to poor planning that resulted in a lack of other options.

### 4. BUT I'VE DONE IT BEFORE!

Why do some highly experienced pilots believe that they can safely fly in marginal conditions or even attempt some extreme manoeuvres? One reason could be that either they, or others that they know, have done it before and "got away with it". This may well be true, but it certainly does not prove that it is safe. Imagine if your son or daughter tried to convince you that it was quite safe to cross a busy road blindfolded because they did it yesterday and survived? What would you say to them?

## 5. BUT I KNOW SOMEONE ELSE WHO DOES IT!

People vary in all kinds of ways: experience, concentration, skill, how they are feeling on a certain day, how much sleep they had, how much sleep they need, the after effects of a recent illness, and their personal or domestic circumstances. If someone else, on a particular day, can top land in a high wind, it does not mean that you can necessarily do the same. The fact that you can does not mean **you should**.

Being a competent pilot means correctly assessing your own limitations on a particular occasion. It does not mean pretending that if someone can do it, then everyone can do it every time; or that if someone else is doing it, that necessarily makes it safe or wise.

## 6. EXERCISING SOUND JUDGEMENT

Paraglider pilots enjoy a great deal of freedom. Regulatory authorities place a great deal of trust in the pilot to exercise competent judgement concerning flight safety. Qualified pilots are thought to be capable of making responsible decisions about whether and where it is safe to fly, taking into account experience level, paraglider type, location, personal physical and emotional state, and prevailing or expected weather conditions. There are two serious threats to the use of this judgement: the pilot may have an excessively optimistic view of the situation or his own ability; or he may be persuaded by others to get airborne **against his better judgement**. How can this be?

## 7. PEER PRESSURE

There will always be people who will pressure you in subtle ways to take a risk that you don't feel comfortable with, asking if you flew on a certain windy day, and smiling smugly if you say that you stayed on the ground whilst they braved the turbulence, low cloud or bad visibility etc. "you didn't fly? What an idiot! I'd have carried on xc....". Perhaps they would, alternatively they might have carried on and **not** returned. Perhaps they have more experience, a higher performing glider, or suicidal tendencies. It doesn't really matter. The fact is the world of paragliding relies on competent and independent pilot judgement, and the pilot is **you**.

If you are swayed by macho talk then you are more afraid of dubious opinions than your own death.

## 8. AUDIENCES: ARE YOU IMPRESSING ANYONE?

Often to impress friends on the ground there is the temptation to "show off" to those watching. This has resulted in serious consequences on many occasions. (In fact, the 'audience' are not necessarily filled with admiration while watching these antics. They may simply be wondering when the accident will happen, and what this person is doing with a paragliding licence.) Before you decide to take such a risk ask yourself: would the people who are watching be prepared to risk their lives to impress you? What would you think of them if they were?

## 9. JOINT DECISIONS

A joint decision made by a group of like-minded people is usually more extreme than a decision that any one of them, alone, would have made. Paraglider pilots tend to be, by their nature, adventurous individuals who are willing to face a certain amount of risk in order to pursue their hobby. Beware of the committee decision: "we'll give it a go!"

## 10. TOTAL EXPERIENCE LEVEL

Many accidents involve experienced pilots. Perhaps they believe that their long experience might allow them to fly safely in unforgiving places or conditions that others are advised to avoid. If this thought ever enters your mind, remember that all those experienced pilots in fatal accident reports also thought that **'it would be alright'**.

Pilots with low hours may be vulnerable to different kinds of accidents. They are more likely to sprain an ankle on landing or maybe lose control of their glider at a critical moment. This is not surprising, given that these pilots are still quite inexperienced, and may be moving for the first time toward some slightly more ambitious flying. They need **your** help and experience to increase their skill database safely.

## 11. USE IT OR LOOSE IT

Recency is also a safety issue; the fact that you could do something perfectly six weeks ago does not mean you can immediately do it now. A skill is like a message written in chalk on an outdoor wall - **it gets eroded a little every day**. If the writing is retraced repeatedly it will become more enduring. Even then, it will be eroded if it is not periodically refreshed. Skills are refreshed via practise, annual refreshers or post- qualification training.

## 12. TRUST ME, I'M A PILOT!

Despite what some people may think, pilots have normal human limitations. The fact that pilots are trained, experienced and competent does not mean that they will always perform perfectly; that they will never have an 'off day', overload, experience illusions or distorted perceptions; or that they will never make a mistake. Everyone recognises that the physical parts of a glider may fail, and this is seen as realistic. Human pilots also have a 'realistic' performance failure rate, and it is **not** zero.

## 13. TO ERR IS HUMAN

One characteristic of human beings is that **we all make mistakes**, no matter how well trained, competent, careful, or skilled we may be. **Nobody** is immune from errors, and the person who imagines that they are infallible is the most dangerous of all.

There are two general classes of error:

- 'Slips and lapses' include errors in setting up your glider or not noticing that your ground speed has changed; and
- 'mistakes' refer to actions that the pilot makes intentionally, and executes correctly, but they turn out to be a bad plan.

In general mistakes are more easily reduced by training and practice. The important thing is to recognise and rectify mistakes - and to learn from them. Slips and lapses can happen to anyone and are, if anything, more likely in highly skilled, experienced people. Be vigilant and take time to think your actions through.

## 14. BELIEVING IS SEEING

There are well known optical illusions that can affect pilots judgement, eg height perception when approaching a sloping landing site. In other circumstances, there can be a mental distortion that is nothing to do with visual illusions as such, but can be just as dangerous. Human beings tend to be selective about what they 'see'. If a person believes something to be true, then they will tend to 'see' only those cues in the environment that are consistent with that belief, treating these as positive confirmation that the belief is correct, and 'not see', 'blot out' or ignore any evidence to the contrary.

Unfortunately, pilots are no exception to this rule. If a pilot has formed the belief that the wind is coming from a certain direction, then his mind may try to organise whatever cues are present to back this up. This means that conscious cross-checks to look for differences to expectations are critically important, and frequently a feature of aviation in general. It's therefore important to not make assumptions and anticipate that things may **not** be as you expect.

For some people it is difficult to accept this about themselves, especially if they are highly qualified and experienced. Believe it: if you are human, this **does** apply to you.

## 15. STRESS

Stress is a familiar feeling to most of us. When people are stressed their judgement can be affected, and their thinking may be unclear. They may suffer from 'tunnel' thinking, concentrating on (or over reacting to) one particular problem to the exclusion of all else. This is dangerous. If there is a problem in flight, **the pilots first priority must be safe flight**. Attention to a faulty radio or harness **must** be a secondary task. If you are feeling stressed before flying, consider whether you should fly at all. If you can foresee a high workload flight, rehearse mentally beforehand, prepare as much as possible ahead of time and, above all, remember that your first priority at all times is to **fly the glider**.

Prioritise in the following order:

**AVIATE- Always keep the glider flying**

**NAVIGATE- Steer away from obstacles. Do you need to land?**

**EVALUATE- What's gone wrong?**

## 16. TRUST ME I'M ELECTRIC

We all put a lot of faith in our electronic instruments, sometimes the information they provide can be all too easy to accept. Do a mental 'reality check' every so often to make sure that ground speed looks sensible or the map is actually moving. Check with a second instrument if you have one, and before all else check your batteries and that your devices are working before you leave the house!

## SUMMARY

Most pilots want to enjoy the freedom to fly when, where and how they want to, whilst maintaining safety for themselves and others. The way to achieve and sustain this situation is to:

- Be realistic about the weather
- Use your judgement responsibly, don't feel pressured to fly
- Know your limitations
- Prepare as thoroughly as you can
- Be prepared to land
- Mentally rehearse possible 'situations'
- Use good practice in your planning and flying
- Don't take unnecessary risks

**SAFE FLYING IS ENJOYABLE FLYING**