

Be Prepared for an Out Landing

A spate of recent occurrences involving gliders has highlighted some areas of concern that the CAA and Gliding New Zealand are addressing.

"The pilot-in-command shall at all times plan and conduct the flight with safety as the paramount factor and with achievement of sporting goals as a desirable accomplishment," – Gliding New Zealand Manual of Approved Procedures.

Be Prepared

Preparation is the key to a safe out landing. If you are always aware of your height above the ground and the options available below you, you will be one step ahead of the game.

This preparation starts before you leave the ground. Always allow for an out landing – even if you think it is highly unlikely. Get everything prepared for a possible retrieval. Is the trailer roadworthy and ready to go? Is the car fuelled up and ready? Have you left your car keys with the person prepared to come and get you?

Below 2000 Feet

Gliding NZ's instructor's handbook says, "The pilot must have selected a suitable field at any time a landing appears likely – ie, below 2000 feet agl." This doesn't mean you must carry out a landing, but it does mean that you should be thinking about your options whenever you are below 2000 feet. Always have an eye out for suitable landing sites and give yourself time to plan an approach and landing. Don't run out of altitude and ideas all at the same time.

If you leave it too late, it is easy to miss suitable places to land. More than one pilot has been embarrassed by the farmer's son's comment, "Why didn't you land on my Dad's airstrip? It's just over the fence."

Below 500 Feet

Gliders have an exemption from rule 91.311 *Minimum heights for VFR flight*.

Rule 104.59 *Minimum height* allows gliders to operate, "below a height of 500 feet above the surface for ridge soaring, if the flight does not create a hazard to a person or property on the ground; or if a gliding instructor is conducting launch failure training."

Of course you can operate below 500 feet if you are taking off or landing, but in essence, you do not have a blanket clearance to fly below 500 feet.

Stretching the Glide

While it is tempting to think you can squeeze a few more miles out of your current height, do not try to stretch the final glide, hoping for the last tiny bit of lift that will enable you to reach the aerodrome. There have been far too many instances of this turning out badly – and at least one recent fatality in New Zealand.

Relying on hope to keep the variometer beeping its high frequency tune could leave you, at best, very embarrassed.

Plan B

A good pilot always has a plan B. And that plan B is always being updated as circumstances change. They will have a selection of paddocks to choose from, should they need them, they will be watching the weather and the conditions change around them, and making adjustments to their plan A – and their plan B.

What-if?

You should keep running what-if scenarios while you fly. "What would I do now if the lift died completely?",

"What will I do if there is no lift off that ridge?", "What will I do if I get stuck in a downdraught?"

PIC Responsibilities

The Manual of Approved Procedures (MOAP) sums-up nicely the pilot-in-command responsibilities from the gliding point of view.

A broad statement at the beginning says, "Responsibility for the safety of the aircraft and for compliance with NZ Civil Aviation Rules, Regulations and associated orders, NOTAMS etc, rests with the pilot-in-command (PIC). The PIC shall be responsible for the aircraft from the time they commence preparation for flight, to the time they secure the aircraft after flight."

Qualifications

All pilots-in-command are responsible for being appropriately qualified and maintaining their currency.

The MOAP states that, "The PIC shall ensure they are appropriately qualified to conduct the operation being undertaken and that they have satisfactorily completed a Biennial Flight Review within the preceding 24 months, and had their log book endorsed to this effect."

Documents

All documents in the aircraft must be current, including the Tech Log.

The MOAP specifically states that, "The PIC is responsible for ensuring that all necessary documents, including current maps relevant to the flight to be undertaken, are available in the aircraft."



Airworthiness

Part 91 requires that before you fly an aircraft, you must be satisfied that it is airworthy and safe for flight. That involves checking the paperwork, and doing a thorough preflight inspection.

Familiarity

The MOAP has conveniently brought together the requirements of Part 91 *General Operating and Flight Rules* and Part 104 *Gliders – Operating Rules* into one location so that glider pilots have all the information they need in one, easy to access, document.

It states, “The PIC shall ensure that, at all times, the aircraft is flown in strict accordance with the established procedures, techniques and rules of Gliding NZ and the affiliate under which the operations are being conducted.”

Out Landings

Out landings are specifically mentioned. “The PIC is responsible for the safety and security of an aircraft when operated away from the home base, ie, after an out landing in a glider until it is returned to its usual place of storage.”

Competition and Goal Flying

Flying in competitions creates a strong desire to win or finish. This desire can affect your commitment to your safety margins – encouraging you to break them. The same thing can happen with goal flights – at 970 km the temptation to push on and make the magic 1000 km mark can be extreme.

Make sure you keep your plan B updated and don't let yourself fall into the trap of being more committed to the finish than a safe outcome.

Fly to Your Abilities

We can't all be world champions, but we can all be safe pilots. Safe pilots know their limitations and fly to them.

Think about, and commit to, your personal minimums before you go flying. They are your safety margins. At what height do you commit to an out landing? How many out landing options do you need at any one time to feel comfortable? What size field do you need for an out landing?

These are just a few questions you should think about before you fly. ■

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