

Winter Season

Keeping with the tradition that at this time of the year the safety officer sends something out telling us to keep warm, etc., this year, this is supported by the BGA 'Seasonal Message Initiative 2017-18'. So check out our Website! Some of you will already have suffered wintry conditions this season, due to the appalling weather experienced here in Chipping, however with dropping temperatures and shorter days, some of these conditions can appear and occur much faster.



Cold Weather

We perform less efficiently when we are cold. Translated, this means our thinking reactions and decision-making slow down significantly. Wearing suitable clothing, getting regular warm drinks and keeping dry is critical to avoiding the rapid onset of mild hypothermia, which is seriously debilitating. Everyone has a duty of care to keep an eye on each other and ensure we relieve tractor and winch drivers more frequently and do not just leave this to the Duty Staff, who may have their hands full.

Dirty flying surfaces

Water, mud and frost on flying surfaces is bad news and if wet, this can freeze instantly on launching, so it is imperative that all gliders must be clean and dry before they fly. Operating airbrakes and a retractable undercarriage before they are actually needed is a sensible precaution if there is any doubt about their operation due to mud or freezing.

Condensation on any surface, especially the canopy, has been known to freeze once airborne.

Windier conditions

If you don't know how to adjust your flying to the state of the wind, obviously you shouldn't be flying. However, it should also influence your decision on currency. If you haven't flown in particular high wind conditions for a long time, whilst you might meet the letter of your card status, a discussion with an instructor would be the sensible option.

If flying close to your limits in terms of the wind, approaching bad weather could well push you beyond them and a precautionary landing is sensible, as for any deterioration in the weather.

It goes without saying that, when launching in crosswinds, we keep a wing down to counteract the drift, and if you want a simulated launch failure in a strong westerly, forget it! The danger in both of these situations is that a cable might fall outside the boundaries of the field, which includes the area around the clubhouse.

Protecting gliders when it gets windy is also a high priority and should always feature highly in your mind before you walk away following your flight.

Wetter Conditions continued

More moisture in the air, together with lower temperatures, often means a lower cloud base.

Flying close to cloud is never a good idea, because of the poor visibility and if the cloud is low on the hill, a number of gliders will be squashed into less airspace. Cloud base can descend very quickly, especially when close to the hill. If you got caught in it, would you know what to do?

If not, discuss with an instructor. If you have any doubt about the cloud base, don't launch!

Condensation on canopies is a major problem. Expecting it to clear "once the glider starts to move" could ruin your day, especially if something goes wrong early in the launch. Dirt exacerbates the situation, making flying with a dirty canopy even less acceptable.



Throw in dazzle from a low sun and an early finish is the sensible option. Canopy cleaning material is a vital part of our safety equipment.

Muddy operations cause soil and stones to accumulate in the bottoms of cockpits and they should be removed during the D.I. and during your ABCD checks before each flight.

Checking the operation of back releases at any time during the day, when it is felt that this may have been affected e.g by becoming frozen, is obviously sensible.

The end of the day cleaning of gliders will not do any harm if done sensibly. Clearly, directing a high powered jet at the canopy fuselage junction is not a good idea and behind the carrying handles at the rear of the fuselage on Ka8s and K13s, all cleaning should be done with care and consideration for the location of pitots, static vents, and open vision panels.

Parachutes must be kept clean and dry and in the DP Van if removed for solo flights on dual aircraft. Never put a parachute on the ground or leave it on chairs to get wet.

Visibility

Winter nights draw in quickly, so don't delay your return until it is too dark, (although it might still be legal). Your eyes require a finite length of time to adjust to lower light intensities. Sudden formation of cloud can also make the transition from light enough to too dark very quickly.

Launching

We often discuss the importance of straightening cables to remove the chance of yawing during the launch and nausea. If the ground is frozen, there is even less chance that they will straighten themselves when tension is applied, nor is it as easy to straighten them manually. Remember that when cables come back along the track, the one nearest to the glider is used first, even if it is not the downwind one: inform the winch driver, but don't consult. In this case, it is not his/her decision.

We know we need to hold the cable release firmly when taking off. In the winter, gloves are almost a necessity, but woollen ones are very smooth and will not provide a good grip - something to think about when selecting what you are to wear.

Snow

Snow cover causes many more issues connected directly or indirectly with flight and flying safety. Snow covering the ground can impair pilots' height perception when landing. It also makes it difficult to spot objects on the ground if you have to land out.

Snow remains on surfaces longer and will go solid in gaps and spaces if allowed. It destroys lift on flying and control surfaces and clogs up towing mechanisms.

Insist on release checks before each flight. It might not be necessary, but it doesn't take much time.

Snow can make it difficult to recognize the field even when relatively close, so if you find the card status seems lower than normal that might be the reason.

If you come late on any day, do not bank on flying continuing until the permitted time. Sensible decisions will be made about the time flying ceases. Arrive early and prepare for flying as soon as it has been agreed to fly. It usually takes longer to get flying when it's colder and when we have snow on the ground. In this way we make best use of the shorter flying hours, reducing pressure on instructors and disappointment.

Take care and see you all at the launch site

Richard Peake - CSO

