Winter Message 2018-19.

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 and hydrating through regular warm drinks and keeping dry is critical to avoid the onset of hypothermia which even in its mildest forms can be 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 not just left to the Duty Staff who may have their hands full. Wear appropriate clothing for the ground and in the air.

Prepare for flying operations, 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. Arriving early allows us to prepare for flying as soon as it has been agreed to fly, it usually takes longer to get flying when it is 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.

Dirty flying surfaces before flight, water, mud and frost on flying surfaces is bad news and if wet, this can freeze instantly on launching and 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 test them prior to launch.

Flying in cold weather, the freezing level can occur at any time or height whilst flying, a cold airframe hitting moisture or a cloud descending from wave, sudden shower etc) can promote icing on the canopy or airframe.

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, especially if you haven't flown in particular high wind conditions for a long time. Protecting gliders when it gets windy is also higher priority and should always feature highly before you walk away following your flight. Consider too, which wing you should be holding when launching, recovering or moving near other aircraft.

Whilst you might meet the letter of your card status, a discussion with an instructor would be the sensible option.

Limits, 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 situation where you experience a deterioration in the weather.

Crosswinds, It goes without saying that in crosswinds we keep a wing down to counteract the drift, and if you want a simulated launch failure in a strong south 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.

It goes without saying that you should always be ready for a real launch failure.

Wetter Conditions, Increased moisture in the air together with lower temperatures often means a lower cloud base and reduced visibility.

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 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 should be removed during the D.I. and during your ABCD checks before each flight.

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 left on chairs to get wet.

Shorter days and visibility, the winter nights draw in quickly so don't delay your return until it is too dark. 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, straightening cables to remove the chance of yawing during the initial ground run during the launch is always the preferred method.

Operating from the top adds problems to the mix where the cables can snag on the edges of the track, particularly when we are using the track to bring cables up. So watch, adjust the cables and warn the pilots of potential swings on launch.

Safety before expediency in this situation.

Frozen ground, means there is even less chance that they will straighten themselves when tension is applied, nor is it as easy to straighten them manually.

Cables, delivered by tractor 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, it is not his/her decision. The unused cable should be moved away from the track of the launching glider and away from the launch area. Tractors should be encouraged to drop the cables before coming into the launch area creating a natural clean area. The parachutes and associated gear should be checked for damage before every flight regardless.

Mud, gravel and water make for an extremely efficient abrasive and also clogs everything it touches. Mud hides problems so check carefully all connections.

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

Snow, brings its own particular challenges and 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 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. Don't use live cables to check release mechanisms.

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.

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 8s and 13s.

All cleaning should be done with care and consideration for the location of the pitot tube, static vents, and open vision panels.

Disclaimer

This document isn't new. It is an amalgamation of many winter messages and created through hard won experiences.
It is shared so that we can avoid those very same experiences close up.

Thanks to everyone who contributed to the editing of the document and for those who report incidents so that we learn and grow safely.

Take care and see you all on the launch site

Richard Peake - CSO