

Safety Management
by Tom Johnson

Safety. What is it? What does it mean when someone tells you to “Fly safely”?

Webster defines it as the condition of being protected from or unlikely to cause danger, risk, or injury.

Aviation safety is a term encompassing the theory, investigation, and categorization of flight failures, and the prevention of such failures through regulation, education, and training.

Last year, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), initiated their Safety Management System. (<https://www.faa.gov/about/initiatives/sms/>) SMS is a structured process that obligates organizations to manage safety with the same level of priority that other core business processes are managed. The idea is to help organizations develop the highly intangible but very real and influential safety culture.

Where does this leave us in the soaring community?

We have all had this conversation. “Honey, I am off to the gliderport.” “All right, Dear. Manage your flight to encompass applicable regulations, education, and training.”

So what does safety really mean for us?

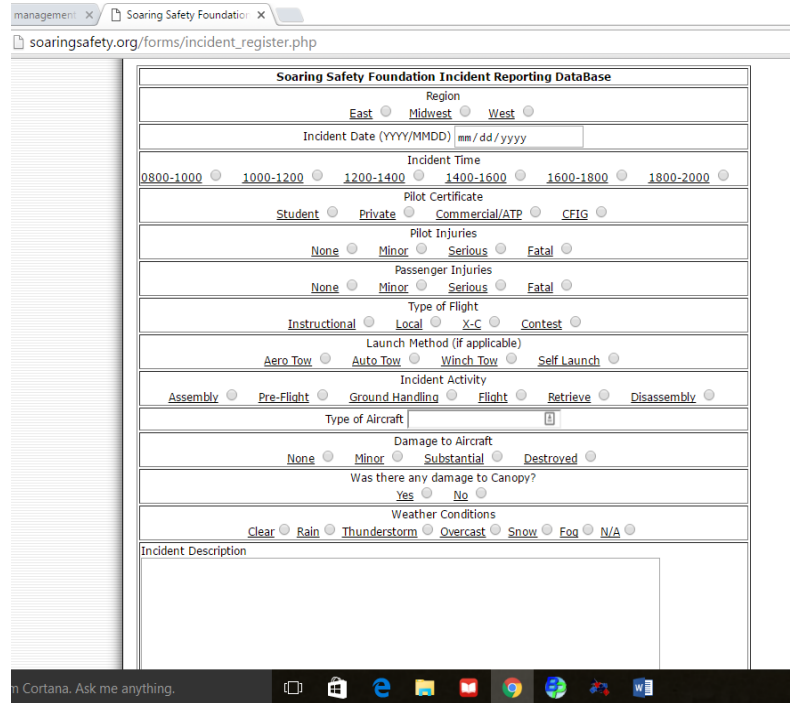
A bit of research leads you to realize aviation safety is about the identification, avoidance, and management of risk. Risk cannot be eliminated entirely, nor should it be. Part of the appeal of our sport is conquering risk. Running 1000 km on the ridge, climbing to 28,000 ft. in the wave, or learning to fly in conditions that are challenging.

So how do we identify risk?

Our experience is a huge player in this endeavor. The more we fly, the more experiences we have. Every time you land, you should review your flight to identify both good and bad events. Talk about the flight with other pilots. Listen to their tales and compare notes.

When you have something of note happen, take a minute and document it on the Soaring Safety Foundation website using the Incident Reporting Database.

<http://soaringsafety.org/forms/incident.html> The form is quick and easy to use.



You may not think it means anything, but it really helps the Trustees identify problem areas.

Once you have identified a risk, you have to assess the risk and determine whether the reward is worth it. Identified hazards are assessed in terms of criticality of their harmful effect and ranked in order of their risk-bearing potential. They are assessed often by experienced personnel, or by utilizing more formal techniques and through analytical expertise. The severity of consequences and the likelihood of occurrence of hazards are determined. If the risk is considered acceptable, operation continues without any intervention. If it is not acceptable, the risk mitigation process is engaged.

Does your 300 km really need to end with a high speed, low altitude finish? Is it really worth it to thermal at 400 ft AGL? How you assess risk depends on many factors. Experience, weather, time of day, pilot competency, etc. And most importantly, are you ready to rationally and dispassionately defend your decision to your peers and people in authority positions? If the answer leaves you with doubt, there is no doubt. Don't do it.

If you have assessed the risk, and you find it unacceptable, you need to implement risk mitigation.

The best risk mitigation is avoidance. Take the risk out of play. He who fights and runs away, lives to fight another day.

Training and education will be used to learn how to deal with new situations. Flying in high winds or strong lift is doable with the right training. Find a good CFGI and use the resource. Do not be afraid to push your skill level in a controlled environment.

Training is the key. Sun Tzu said that the more you train in peace, the less you bleed in war. So too with flying. The more you train and seek aviation knowledge, the better you will be equipped to fly protected from or unlikely to cause danger, risk, or injury.