



## **HOORAY, IT'S SPRING**

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I'm sitting inside my nice warm house in Illinois while outside, the temperature is 10 degrees Fahrenheit with a wind chill of -2 degrees and I realize that flying gliders today is not a worthwhile effort.

However, preparing for those days when again I'll be able to soar, I examined the NTSB accident reports to see if there was anything in there that would indicate the cause of an accident was not being prepared (or even being over-enthusiastic) to get started for the season.

For several years, the Soaring Safety Foundation has been reminding us to consciously prepare for those first flights by taking an instructor along. Though no attempt is made here to analyze or place probable cause for the accidents viewed, reading the reports did raise my eyebrows. I realized the obvious – who's gonna give the instructor his first ride???

1. Back in January, 2008 a glider instructor was riding with a student in interesting weather conditions: 3900 feet ceiling, wind about 20 degrees off runway heading, gusting 30 to 37 knots, and a light rain (Obviously not located in the winter-suffering part of the country.)

On making a successful landing, the pilot allowed the glider to drift off the taxiway and strike a light. The instructor apparently did not take control soon enough.

2. While under tow at only 200 feet or so, the ride was uncomfortable enough the pilot released, but was unable to return to the field. On landing off-airport, the glider ground looped, causing substantial damage. On the one hand, the pilot acted with good judgment but then didn't continue to fly the glider to a stop.
3. During takeoff, a motorglider pilot on his first flight in a motorglider after removing the glider from storage, had the wing go down and was unable to raise it with proper control inputs. The damage was substantial.

Examination by the authorities found one of the ailerons not connected. The pilot stated he had not performed a positive control check.

4. A student pilot, during a tow, saw the glider climb above normal tow position and sight of the tow plane was lost. Full control stick forward and full nose-down trim did not adequately change the nose position, and the glider landed hard on a turf runway, causing substantial damage.

Upon examination of the glider cockpit, a hand-held radio was found lying loose on the floor.

5. During a tow, the spoilers opened full. The tow pilot used the rudder waggle tow signal "There's Something Wrong With Your Glider." The glider pilot misinterpreted the signal and released at about 100 feet above the surface.

What can we learn from these accidents?

First, instructors are not infallible and should be especially careful during flights made early in the season. This isn't to say they shouldn't be careful on ALL flights, but recognize they may be as "rusty" as a student or private pilot and stay alert for any problem that may arise and not hesitate to take control of the glider.

Second, student pilots are required to be under continuous observation by an instructor on the field and should recognize the necessity to review FAR's and operational procedures such as SSA Recommended Signals prior to those early flights.

Third, the pilot should not allow any – any – loose items in the glider, especially during takeoff and landing. Return the radio or water bottle to a secure position after each use.

Fourth, Fly the glider until completely stopped. There are frequent reports of a pilot, under stress caused by another real or conceived problem, failing to keep the glider under control while rolling out. A cardinal rule for any ground operation is "Steer on the ground with your feet." Crosswinds require an effort to not only keep the glider going straight, by lowering the upwind wing to keep the crosswind from getting under the upwind wing, and at the same time, control the direction with your feet.

Fifth, it is not only good operational practice to perform a positive control check prior to any flight, it is doubly important after the long layoff over the winter. Mice and other animals have been known to build nests in the most inconvenient and difficult places to see. Some operations do not require a positive control check prior to each flight, but have a policy of doing so prior to the first flight of the day.

Sixth, use checklists. While it won't stop all accidents, it will ease your mind that you have done everything you can do to have a safe flight.

