

Bad News

by SSF Trustees Bernald S. Smith & Gene Hammond

Folks, lets get serious about our flying. According to the data listed below from the NTSB and other sources, for the years 1999-2004 inclusive, there were 48 glider/towplane fatalities. We have to go on faith with the government data, but if it's even close to being correct, that's pretty bad for what's going on.

This is where those 48 fatalities of 1999-2004 were located, what a snapshot of the SSA members' population is in those areas and the relative 6-year fatal ratios:

Region	States	a	b [^]	(a/b)x100
Northeast	(ME,MA,NH,VT,RI,CT)	1	593	0.17
East	(NY,NJ,PA,DC,MD,DE)	11	1601	0.69
Southeast	(VA,WV,NC,SC,GA,FL,VI,PR)	3	1396	0.22
EastCentral	(MI,IN,OH,KY,TN,AL,MS)	3	1147	0.26
Central	(WI,IL,MN,IA,MO,AR,LA,ND,SD,NE,KS)	1	1110	0.09
WestCentral	(TX,OK,CO,WY)	6	1575	0.38
Southwest	(UT,AZ,NM)	8	737	1.09
West	(CA,NV,HI,GU)	10	1823	0.55
Northwest	(WA,OR,ID,MT,AK)	5	651	0.77
USA	total	48	10633	0.45

b[^] is a snapshot of the SSA membership, on 5Mar04, not including military overseas, nor foreign, members.

We know that all folks flying gliders in the USA are not members of SSA, and the NTSB data does not always get reports of every accident, even when it's a fatal, as we've determined by other accident sources!

We just recently learned that Finland has not had a gliding fatality in the last 16 years; granted their number of soaring people involved is far less, and their soaring season is no doubt shorter, especially when you consider that many of our sites are 365-day operations. But what are we doing wrong? Is there a cultural difference that we could determine as one causal factor? Is there a training problem?

We don't have the overall control that many countries do in which the national organization provides full oversight, so no one not from a particular operation in the US has the authority to bring about change. We have lots of mountains, lots of traffic, and lots of hot/humid weather. Yes, we have lots of excuses! SSF can only exhort, do site surveys (if you ask for one!), conduct Instructor Clinics (if you attend!), Safety Seminars (if you ask for one at your site or attend one somewhere!), write articles (if you read them!) and hope someone's listening (are you?).

In the final analysis, how you run your club/chapter/fbo and how you instruct, determines whether your operation or students will have an accident, but most importantly, how you fly, determines whether you will have an accident and whether you will be a fatality.