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THREE C'S PROMOTE SAFETY

In 1991, SSA President Hal Lattimore developed the SSA Safety Task Force to study causes and potential cures for accidents and incidents.

Though many could be attributed to poor decision-making, three areas were recognized within those poor decisions:

Currency

Competency

Complacency

Currency

While being current is not the total answer to safe operations, it is painfully clear that one who is **not** current is more susceptible to being involved in an accident than one who **is** current.

Many glider pilots in the U.S. average less than 10 hours flying per year, probably making less than 20 tows per year.

Is this adequate to maintain currency? Since the only required instruction and/or checking of pilot skills is the Flight Review, the U.S. pilot is exposed to a pervasive misconception. The FAR regarding currency is an absolute minimum, and each pilot must judge whether he/she can operate safely with only the absolute minimum currency ..... not many can.

The pilot must concentrate during his/her flying to maximize that expenditure of time and money. Thirty minutes of concentrated practice will raise the pilot's currency more than two hours of "just joy ridin."

Competency

With so few flights per year, is he/she adequately skillful at handling the glider in all phases of soaring? The discovery that the pilot is not skillful enough may come too late to protect the tow pilot from an upset on takeoff, or overstress the towplane once aloft.

Other signs of a decreased competency may be inability to make a turn without slipping or skidding (straight string?), failure to consistently roll out of a turn on a specific heading, failure to recognize the necessity to correct for wind drift enroute or in the traffic pattern.

With the percentage of glider accidents during the approach and landing phase irritatingly stable at 70-80%, one questions whether the gliding community is receiving adequate instruction on operating in the pattern and landing. While making a good pattern has been said to be primary to making a good landing, the REAL goal on EVERY flight is to land safely on the airport and on or beyond the intended spot. If a pilot can't do that, there is a definite lack of competency. Especially true is if a pilot thinks he/she is as COMPETENT on the first take off of the season as on the last landing the previous fall is just fooling himself/herself.

Complacency

If one were to have been a fly on the cockpit wall of any aircraft involved in an accident or incident, the complacency of the "crew" would define the result. In the case of gliders, complacency plays a large part in failure to close and lock the canopy, spoilers or other controls not properly connected, spoilers extended during take off, items in the cockpit floating around, taking off with tail wheel dolly still attached, and other avoidable things.

Amazing as it may sound, proper use of written checklists can avoid many pitfalls we see and hear about in soaring. Allowing outside detractions to interfere with assembling the glider or doing a thorough preflight walkaround has been proven to lead to several incidents and accidents.

Complacency sprouts and grows where you may never think to look. Your log book shows hundreds of tows scattered over several years. Past experience has carried you well, it should – should - carry you again .... but will it? Each flight presents its own differences, and you must be constantly alert for those subtle (or not so subtle) differences.

However, like most things in our complicated lives, simply blaming the accidents on one item or another is not enough. We must recognize practicing currency will improve competency but feeling competent may lead to complacency.

The Soaring Safety Foundation recognizes the necessity to promote safety in soaring is not a new idea, but something that has always been an integral part of soaring, promoted heavily at times, not so heavily at others.

Accidents are rarely a product of one mistake, but several poor decisions strung together to create a situation that finally becomes insurmountable. Recognizing having made a poor decision earlier and doing something about it can break the string and avoid an accident or incident.

Only through a continuing reminder that we must always operate safely can we expect to

reduce accidents and incidents. One moment of inattentiveness and BANG – another statistic.

"LEARN FROM THE MISTAKES OF OTHERS; YOU WON'T LIVE LONG ENOUGH TO MAKE THEM ALL YOURSELF."