



Airspace in the New Century – Revisited

By

Richard Carlson SSF Chairman

In January 2000 SOARING published an article by Jim Short entitled “**Airspace in the New Century**”. That article provided US glider pilots with 12 concrete actions that they could use to enhance safety and deal with the evolving US airspace system. Here again are those 12 action items.

1. Prominent posting of airline arrival / departure routes and expected altitudes at your soaring site.

Are there major airline or corporate arrival or departure routes in your area? What do you know about the Standard Instrument Departure (SID), Standard Terminal Arrival Route (STAR), or Required Navigation Performance (RNP) procedures this traffic might be using? Some of this you can infer, but to really understand them need to talk to somebody who uses these procedures. Are there any airline or corporate pilots in your club or at your commercial operation? If so, get them to explain how the ATC system in your area works. Get the facts and mark up a current sectional chart to show the routes and altitudes normally used. Then post this chart on your clubhouse/office wall. If there is an arrival fix near your field, consider putting the GPS coordinates into your turnpoint database so you will know when you are near it. Also note how this route is used, that aircraft will be evenly spaced as they approach the destination airport. If you see one, chances are that there is another one as close as 3 miles in trail which will be passing by in less than 2 minutes. Once you know the pattern you will have increased your Situational Awareness (SA) and made it easier to keep track of these potential hazards.

2. Conduct regular, recurrent training on airspace structure and use.

Regular recurrent training can help everyone stay current and proficient. Need a little help with airspace? Visit the SSF web site and review the National Airspace System presentation at <http://www.soaringsafety.org/presentation/FIRC/Airspace-short-07.ppt>

3. Promote face-to-face meetings between glider operators and FAA personnel so that each understands the other.

Most FAA Flight Standards District Offices (FSDO's) have a safety officer whose duties include meeting with local pilots and flying clubs/schools. Contact them to see how to invite him/her out for a visit. Be prepared to explain your operations. Where do you tow, release? Are you doing local, X-C, or a mix of flights. Where are those house thermals and what are your typical operating altitudes?

While FSDO personnel can provide lots of useful information they do not operate Air Traffic Control (ATC) facilities. You will need to contact your local ATC facility to talk about arrival/departure routes and procedures. Contact the FAA Regional Office in your area for help in getting the ATC phone number. Use the marked up sectional you already created and have them explain when such routes are in use.

This is also a good opportunity to discuss the establishment of a pair of unique transponder codes, one for the gliders and the other for your tow-planes. Discuss the benefits to them by showing how this can increase the controllers SA by noting that a glider code will make frequent altitude, heading, and speed changes during a flight. The tow-plane code will make short flights and it is also an indicator that non-transponder equipped aircraft may be operating in that area.

4. Conduct group visits to local ATC facilities so that glider pilots can understand the nature of local commercial traffic and hear the first-hand experiences of controllers.

While you are talking with ATC ask them about a site visit. It's a great learning experience for all pilots.

5. Invite FAA air traffic control to glider meets and contests.

While you are talking to the FSDO make a point of inviting them out to a contest or fun-fly meet. Most of them are pilots too, and they might enjoy learning something about soaring.

6. Post NOTAMs for meets and contests.

NOTAMs have changed dramatically since the attacks of 9/11. Huge blocks of airspace can become restricted or prohibited with little advanced notice when a Temporary Flight Restriction (TFR) is posted. Entry into this airspace leads to enforcement action by the FAA. Don't get caught unaware! NOTAMs also allow you to notify other airspace users of your soaring operation. This should include both normal operating altitudes and areas. Glider clubs in the Washington DC area routinely post NOTAMs by calling ATC. This notice goes out to all area pilots and it even winds up on the Dulles ATIS broadcast so arriving airliners are informed.

7. Define local areas that are relatively safe for soaring activities.

Mark up that sectional you have recently hung on your clubhouse/office wall! Also remember that low traffic area do not equal no traffic areas, don't become complacent!

8. Voluntarily avoid high risk areas where traffic concentration is normally the greatest.

Knowing when certain airspace is likely to be active can make you a better pilot. If opposing traffic is operating at a specific altitude, consider leaving the thermal early instead of milking it for every last foot of altitude.

9. Increase our personal vigilance at critical altitudes where specific traffic is likely to exist as we operate close to clouds.

Knowing where to look for traffic can improve the odds of finding it. Remember FAR 91.159 and 91.179 respectively define the VFR and IFR cruising altitudes. East bound IFR traffic will be at the odd thousands feet MSL altitudes with VFR traffic 500 ft higher. West bound traffic uses the even thousand altitudes in the same manner.

10. Expand our personal standard cloud clearances beyond the regulatory minimums.

We all memorized the VFR cloud separation requirements in the FAR's for Class G & E airspace. Nothing stops you from setting higher personal minimums.

11. Consider if a Mode C transponder might work in your personal case.

Mode 'C' transponders report your position and altitude in response to interrogations from ATC radar or TCAS equipped aircraft. This can help get you noticed by other traffic. In addition, GPS based technologies – in the form of ADS-B – are currently being tested in certain areas of the country. Consider being an early adopter of this technology.

12. Keep an open mind on how we can be a part of the solution.

While glider pilots have a low regulatory burden, things may change as a result of the August 28, 2006 midair. Voluntary compliance with transponder regulations can help us maintain our rights and privileges while we operate in the US airspace system. Finally, look for other opportunities to make soaring safer.

