



## Be Proactive in Evaluating your Pilot Risk

By Ron Ridenour, Soaring Safety Trustee

The Soaring Safety Foundation has long advocated the use of the P.A.V.E. checklist to help pilots evaluate the risks associated with a scenario. In this article, we'll talk about the pilot risk evaluation. As stated in the Pilots Handbook for Aeronautical Knowledge FAA-H-8083-25B (PHAK), "The goal of risk management is to proactively identify safety-related hazards and mitigate the associated risks." This article is directed toward pilots and instructors alike. Instructors must be teaching decision making and risk management skills and pilots must be using these same skills to exercise good judgment while flying. The goal is to use this technique proactively to avoid accidents or incidents before they happen.

Recently, the Soaring Safety Foundation has been making a presentation about a program called "FLYTOP" during our Flight Instructor Revalidation Courses. The FLYTOP program was developed and introduced in the European soaring community. The basic concept is to proactively look for areas where changes in procedures can be made to avoid an accident or incident. This is different from making a reactive change after an incident or accident has happened. This reactive change is generally how things are done, but a proactive change will enhance safety before an accident happens. Each individual has a different perception on how a situation develops and may be able to make a measurable contribution to safety just by 'speaking up' or personally changing how they accomplished certain tasks.

Now let's discuss how we can use the "P" in the P.A.V.E. checklist to proactively assess and manage the risks associated with the pilot. The SSF recommends the pilot evaluate their currency and proficiency as a first step. The SSF also recommends the use of the "I'M SAFE" checklist. The "I" is for illness, "M" is for medication, "S" is for stress, "A" for alcohol, "F" for fatigue and "E" for eating or emotion. This is a tool we can use help a pilot evaluate their physical health as is required by 14 CFR Part §61.53 (As glider pilots we are not required to hold a medical certificate, however we must be in compliance with §61.53: Prohibition on operations during medical deficiency).

A topic that's often overlooked, when talking about the pilot, is the effect of Hazardous Pilot Attitudes. These attitudes may be ingrained or learned traits that will affect a pilot's judgment, decision making and risk mitigation. By proactively identifying these hazardous pilot attitudes and applying the corresponding antidote, you can enhance safety and reduce your chance of getting hurt, damaging your aircraft, or putting a big dent in your pocketbook. These five Hazardous Attitudes are outlined in the PHAK.

Anti-authority: "Don't tell me what to do." The antidote is, "Follow the Rules, They are usually right." The pilot who has this attitude generally is resentful of having someone tell them what to do. They may regard rules and regulations as unnecessary and not follow them. In soaring, one rule that is often disregarded is the rule that requires us to stay 500 feet below the base of the clouds. This rule was made to mitigate the risk of a mid-air collision between VFR traffic and high speed IFR traffic descending from above the clouds to below the clouds.

Impulsivity: "Do it quickly." The antidote is, "Not so Fast, Think First." The pilot who is impulsive may skip the use of the takeoff checklist in order to expedite the launch. This has been known to cause



accidents because the pilot is not properly ready for the launch. Maybe they forgot to properly latch and lock the canopy, or close and lock the spoilers, or brief the procedures for an emergency during the early stages of the tow.

**Invulnerability:** "It won't happen to me." The antidote is, "It could happen to me." Pilots who think that they are invulnerable are more likely to take chances and are at an increased risk of having an accident or incident. These pilots may tend to delay the decision to make an off-field landing until they are at a very low altitude. They may try to thermal at a low altitude to make a "save" to avoid landing out. The invulnerability attitude allows this type of behavior even though there is a high risk of a serious accident if the glider inadvertently stalls due to wind gusts or improper control inputs.

**Macho:** "I can do it." The antidote is, "Taking chances is foolish." Pilots with this attitude will try to prove themselves by taking risks in order to impress others. Low altitude high speed passes over the airport would be an example of this attitude. Watch me! This not only puts the macho pilot at risk but may put other pilots at risk as well if they need to take drastic action to avoid this pilot's maneuver. In contest flying the SSA contest board decided that these high risk maneuvers were not necessary and, the "finish cylinder", was developed as a safer alternative. This different kind of finish procedure allows the pilot to fly a normal pattern and landing.

**Resignation:** "What's the Use?" The antidote is "I'm not Helpless, I can make a difference." Pilots who display this trait feel that whatever happens depends on luck, either good or bad. They may go along with other another pilots plan, even though they don't think they can accomplish the plan. Rather than formulate their own plan and execute it, they may follow others along blindly not fully understanding the plan until they are 'in over their heads'.

These Hazardous Attitudes can lead a pilot into a situation that is difficult to recover from and may result in an accident or incident. They are often ignored when making a risk evaluation about the pilot. They may be recognized either by an instructor, fellow pilot or the pilot themselves and should be dealt with by applying the antidote. This simple evaluation could lead to fewer accidents or incidents and make Soaring a safer sport for all those involved.