



A Breath of Fresh Air

By Stephen Dee, SSF Trustee, DPE, ATP, CFI

Just like my good friend Burt Compton, I sometimes wander the country giving check rides where needed. Whenever I can, I try to combine such travel to include multiple locations, and had the chance to do so this summer while attending AirVenture 2021 at Oshkosh. A glider club nearby had 3 Applicants ready for their Practical Tests, so off I went to assist.

It was evident from the time I arrived that this club had adopted, and was using a Safety Culture, and it thrilled my heart to see Risk Mitigation in action. After a thorough Oral Exam, I approached the unfamiliar flight line for flights with the first Applicant. After quickly scanning the runway environment, I observed 2 potentially hazardous situations. The first was the fact that the grass runway we were going to use was not level, with a classic hump in the middle, and it was impossible to see the full length of the runway from either end. This was particularly noteworthy due to the virtually no wind condition of the day, and the fact that a lot of very light and ultralight aircraft were utilizing this airport as a gateway to Oshkosh, and many of them had no radios. Consequently, aircraft were taking off and landing from the grass in both directions, unseen until they broached the hump, which would make things pretty uncomfortable for an aero tow just getting airborne only to meet opposing traffic mid airport. The second hazard was that there was an intersecting paved runway right at the peak of the hump; most of the bigger powered aircraft preferred the hard surface. Due to the lower elevation of the takeoff end of the grass runway where we were staged for launch, it was impossible to see the takeoff end of the paved runway from our position. The potential for a mid air collision at the intersection seemed very great, especially if the paved runway departure traffic was not radio equipped.

My first verbal challenge to the Applicant was something like “Do you see anything potentially dangerous about this airport environment?” At that point, the Applicant replied that “Yes, we have a plan for that!” He then proceeded to explain: we have learned that it takes eyes and ears at the airport’s midfield runway intersection to operate here safely. Prior to commencing ops, we position one person with a hand held radio at the peak of the hump runway intersection, and another radio equipped person we call the Air Boss at our launch point. After the PIC in the glider indicates readiness for launch, and before the wing runner raises the wing, the Air Boss must assure that the runways are clear by making a radio call to the mid airport observer.

I observed this plan in action throughout the day’s operations, and observed many delayed takeoffs, waiting for unseen traffic to clear. This showed me that these guys were not just talking a good line, but were putting their Risk Mitigation plan into consistent use. One nice take away of the resultant increased traffic Situation Awareness was that it helped make my role as a DPE easier and safer; planning and executing the dreaded Premature Termination of the Tow event can be tough to work into the profile safely when there are multiple aircraft and runways involved.





This club's heads up operations did not cease when the flying was done. I observed that all the gliders towed to and from the hangar to the flight line had towlines of sufficient length, and at least 2 persons per glider to keep the glider from overrunning the tug on the airport's undulating terrain. My heart smiled as I watched them put away their equipment: one person in charge, directing movers and observers doing this and that until all was inside the hangar and the door closed. Another safe and enjoyable day at the glider club-truly a breath of fresh air!

If you would like to reference the multitude of SSF resources to improve the Safety Culture of your club or business, visit the newly orchestrated SSA website at: www.ssa.org. Finding the SSF there is a little obscured, but start by clicking on Safety & Training. Then go to the right side menu, and select from any of the items below Safety Videos to gain access the SSF Home Page. These include the Incident Menu, Scenario Database, NTSB Reports, Site Survey Program, and Safety Seminars. From the SSF Home page, you can access SSF Flight Training Programs, Operational Resources, Flight Safety Programs, and About SSF. Learn what you need there or email any of the SSF Trustees with questions directly from the contact info provided.

