



Operational Safety Bulletin

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Convenience Accidents

It has been noted over many years that a significant percentage of reported accidents and incidents indicate that Clubs and/or pilots have modified their normal operating procedures, or abandoned accepted best practice, for no reason other than convenience. Whilst many resulting accidents/incidents have been minor in nature, many have also been serious and some very likely fatal.

Some examples of “convenience accidents” are as follows:

- A pilot facing an outlanding selects a suitable paddock at a suitable height to allow for a safe standard circuit, but then changes his/her mind because another paddock is closer to a road and looks like it will be more convenient for the trailer retrieve. Upon arrival at the paddock the pilot finds the paddock is not really very suitable but by now there is not enough height for another choice (or a proper circuit) and must now do the best he/she can. The accident that results can be any one of a number of available options.
- A pilot returning from a cross-country flight finds that there has been a wind change and the strip that he/she took off from now has a cross wind, but the car with all the towing gear is still parked at the take off point. The pilot decides that even although the wind appears rather strong a cross wind landing should not be beyond his/her capabilities and anyway landing near the car is much more convenient than landing into wind strip and then walking to the car. The pilot becomes a bit alarmed on short final when it is realised that the wind is even stronger than first thought and in fact it also seems to have a down wind component, but by now it is all too late. The pilot lands (rather badly) and loses control on the ground run, drops a wing and the glider heads off the strip. If the pilot is having a particularly bad day of course the glider will head straight for the car.
- Hangar flights can similarly go wrong when the convenience of getting gliders back to the hangar unduly influences decision making; under other circumstances the landing might be considered unnecessarily hazardous.
- A Club normally operating from a Regional Airport has gone to a small private airstrip for a camp. The Club decides that operations can be a little less formal and it will add to the “fun” of the event. Because the strip is short it is decided to launch from the end of the strip. However, landing gliders become a problem for operations as launches are constantly being held up waiting for gliders to be towed back to the launch point. To reduce the problem as the wind is only light it is decided that gliders will land down wind and roll up to the launch point. All goes well for a while and everyone is enjoying the variation to non-standard operations and the challenge of getting the landings “just right”. The Instructors check all the pilots to make sure that everyone is up to the task before solo

attempts. Bill did a good job on his check but on his first solo attempt he appears to be landing longer than he should and the alarmed onlookers quickly realise that there is very little margin for error. The glider passes the parked gliders at considerable speed and is heading towards the end fence. Bill realising that his life is in considerable peril initiates a ground-loop and the glider stops in a cloud of dust just short of the end fence. There is some damage to the glider but the pilot is unharmed and the club reverts to good tried and true standard operating procedures and nobody further suggests non-standard operating procedures for convenience.

Departures from standard circuit and landing procedures inevitably have a potential to go wrong and just how wrong should never be underestimated. In all but the most exceptional of circumstances reciprocal landings decrease safety standards, but reciprocal landings certainly can sometimes be convenient.

Summary

Good operating procedures and flying standards are developed over time and built on the experience of many pilots and many mistakes. Pilots should always be aware that even slight departures from standard accepted good practice can have severe consequences. There is no doubt that convenience can be a seductive force and very many pilots (and clubs) have been tempted into bad decisions and choices for no other reason.

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