



# Operational Safety Bulletin

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## Airspace Clear For Launch

It should be obvious to all that it is essential for pilots preparing to launch to be aware of any airspace activities in their vicinity and the threat, if any, posed by the presence of other aircraft.

Lookout is the principal method for implementing see-and-avoid. Effective lookout means seeing what is 'out there' and assessing the information that is received before making an appropriate decision.

Every glider pilot is familiar with the wingtip runner's, or cable hook-up person's, advice to pilots "*all clear above and behind*" prior to the commencement of launches; however, the true intention of this advice is not always fully understood.

The 'above and behind' advice is intended to inform the pilot of any activity in that airspace that is not readily (or possibly) visible to the pilot from his/her position when seated in the glider ready for launch.

It does not, in its standard form, advise the pilot of all local airspace activity. Nevertheless, there are many occasions when launch assistants do provide more extensive advice to pilots, and at many clubs it is standard practice to do so in order to enhance operational safety. For example, clubs operating at sites where:

- parachute operations are conducted;
- contra-operations are conducted, such as taking off downhill and landing uphill,
- crosswind operations are conducted across the operational runway, or
- a glider will occasionally fly a circuit on the opposite side to the standard circuit direction,

will carry out an "airspace clear for launch" check that covers all of these potential areas of conflict to achieve the required situational awareness.

However, it must always be accepted that the ultimate responsibility for proceeding with any launch rests with the pilot, and the pilot must be satisfied that the surrounding airspace is safe to launch into by whatever means the pilot chooses to establish its status.

Nothing should happen with regard to taking up slack until the Pilot In-Command (PIC) has ascertained the airspace is clear for launch. Launch crews must not pressure the PIC to abbreviate pre-flight checks and situational awareness. Launch point discipline and hygiene is vital; distractions must be avoided and onlookers kept out of the way.

Beware of launch crew dilution of PIC responsibility. The launch crew may assist in improving the PIC's situational awareness but their input does not obviate the PIC's responsibility.

PIC fatigue, particularly for instructors and tug pilots conducting multiple flights, may detract from lookout and situational awareness, or introduce complacency and lax airspace clearance checks. Pilots must be vigilant to ensure this does not occur.

Training for wing runners, forward signallers and other ground staff must include specific training on **systematically scanning airspace** and providing reliable advice to the PIC. At many clubs, very junior members are often involved in these duties, so proper briefing and supervision is required.

Supervising instructors should routinely monitor the **process** of airspace clearance, and intervene if there are shortfalls in either PIC or launch crew checks or lookout.

Remember also: **ANYBODY** can, and must if they perceive a conflict or danger, initiate a halt to proceedings with the words "**STOP, STOP, STOP**". Whenever possible, raise one or both arms with palms and fingers outstretched as a visual cue.

## **Airfield Operations**

Gliding operations must always be conducted in a manner that conforms to GFA requirements and those for operations at the site in use. They must also be conducted in a manner that is predictable and minimises the possibility of potential conflicts. For example:

- The GFA recommendation for having both a 'wing-tip' signaller and 'forward' signaller for aerotow operations ensures the maximum monitoring of airspace during the launch sequence.
- Launch points should be chosen on the basis of providing the maximum visibility of airspace on approach, overhead, in the circuit (both sides) and into which the glider is about to launch; and
- If the airfield is large enough, different take-off and landing strips could be employed to separate launching and landing gliders.

It should always be remembered that if there is a possibility for conflict, it will almost certainly one day occur.

## **Tug pilots, self-launching sailplane pilots & winch/tow car drivers**

Tug pilots and self-launching sailplane pilots should comply with the requirements of CAR 246 and manoeuvre their aircraft so that they are able to observe incoming and outgoing traffic as well as traffic on the manoeuvring area of the aerodrome, in order that they may avoid collision with other aircraft during the take-off. Also be alert to vehicles engaged in towing and retrieving gliders or cables.

Winch/tow car drivers must check the area ahead of the launch for other taxiing aircraft, traffic on crossing runways, etc. before applying launch power.

## **Airborne pilot's responsibilities**

Consideration should always be given to the manner in which the circuit is joined, particularly when returning from cross-country flights, in order to minimise the risk of conflict.

Whilst pilots preparing to land have right of way, they should always be aware that it is prudent and responsible to ensure that they remain clear of airspace used by launching gliders and other aircraft. They should also ensure that their activities are predictable and do not unnecessarily conflict with other aircraft taking-off.

Pilots flying while winch launching is in progress must be particularly conscious of the necessity to remain clear of the launch area. The winch end of a runway should also be considered a potential hazard and be given a wide berth. It is recommended that pilots stay outside a 500 metre radius of the winch and that pilots should never approach and land from the winch end unless in an emergency or operationally necessary. It is recognised that some winch clubs adopt a policy that allows pilots to 'get away' from the launch and thermal in the vicinity of the winch immediately following a launch. Apart from this concession, the winch launching area during winch launching operations must be a strictly adhered to "no-fly zone".

## Radio

The primary tool of **alerted** see-and-avoid that is common across aviation is the radio. Radio allows for the communication of information to the pilot from the ground or from other aircraft. Radio is also useful for the wing runner, to aid in situational awareness, monitoring of gliders or aircraft that might affect the launch operation, and monitoring tug pilot communications.

A radio announcement prior to each and every launch is a standard operating procedure at many gliding sites and is expected by other operators. It is always prudent to make prior radio announcements of launch intentions on the appropriate frequency (or frequencies) in the interest of enhancing overall safety.

For aerotow combinations, the tug pilot should give a rolling call when ready to launch. With winch launching operations, GFA recommends all launch signals, including the 'take-up slack' and 'all out' commands, be given on the CTAF or local aerodrome frequency. These additional calls improve situational awareness for pilots flying in the area.

## Conclusion

There have been many occasions when launches have proceeded when local airspace safety has been compromised, sometimes with serious consequences.

The Club's SMS is a proven system and set of processes for managing risk that ties all elements of the organisation together and ensures appropriate allocation of resources to hazards and safety issues. Pilots, Training Panels and Club's/Organisation's Safety Committee should consider their local circumstances and adopt policies that best suit their situations within the framework of required operational procedures.

Many Clubs will no doubt confirm that their current procedures are safe. However, no club or pilot should be content that because there have not been any problems that there will never be. Complacency is a major risk driver, from a human factors perspective. Independent checks of procedures, including Operations Safety Audits and advice from visiting Regional Managers of Operations, Level 3 instructors or State Safety Managers, can improve the integrity of processes and procedures. Analysis of near misses and incidents can also inform better procedures.



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## References:

GFA Manual of Standard Procedures – [Part 2 \(Operations\)](#)

GFA [Airways & Radio Procedures Manual](#)

CAAP 92-1 - [Guidelines for Aeroplane Landing Areas](#)

CAAP 166-1 - [Operations in the vicinity of non-controlled aerodromes](#)

CAAP 166-2 - [Pilots' responsibility for collision avoidance in the vicinity of non-controlled aerodromes using 'see-and-avoid'](#)

Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) Aviation Research Report published 1 April 1991  
[Limitations of the See-and-Avoid Principle](#)