



Operations Advice Notice

No. 04/24

11th September 2024

Reinstating Winch Launch Operations

Purpose. This Operations Advice Notice (OAN) addresses issues reinstating winch operations or starting new winch operations at gliding sites. With the recent Airworthiness Directive issued for Piper Pawnee towplanes an increased interest has arisen.

The Gliding Australia Winch Launching Manual OPS007 (<https://tinyurl.com/yck6ywas>) is our reference.

Your club may be current with winch operations, may have done winch operations in the past or may be considering starting operations. If your club is currently using a winch often, please continue the good work. You may consider talking to nearby clubs and offering to do some flights with their members. It is very important that we keep currency up during potentials shutdowns.

In all these situations, **your first point of call should be the Regional Manager Operations (RMO)** for your state.

If you are reinstating or starting a new winch operation, please consider the list below:

1. **Contact the airfield operator**, as well as other operations on the airfield and discuss your plans. This is important.
2. If you are borrowing or purchasing a winch, **check for a cable cutter**:

“A means of cutting the cable in an emergency shall be provided that can be operated from inside the cab to enable the winch driver to cut the cable in the very unlikely event of it failing to release from the glider. The cable-cutting device must be periodically tested.”¹

3. **If there is no cable cutter on the winch**, check the requirements in Appendix A
4. **Rope is preferred** to wire. Most airfield operators would prefer the use of rope.
5. **Obstacles around your airfield have changed since winch operations were in use.** Trees have grown. New power lines may have been run. New neighbours may have moved in.

“It is not unknown for an RM/O to refuse operations on a site which met the minimum length requirements but had too many potential hazards for reasons such as power lines or trees too close to one edge of the strip or turbulence in the lee of a hill in the most common wind directions.”²

6. **Consider your neighbours.** It does not matter how skilful you are, drogue chutes and lines wander. Consider talking to your neighbours.

¹ OPS 0007 Winch Launching Manual

² OPS 0007 Winch Launching Manual section 5.2

“Winch launching is a relatively low cost and rapid way to get a glider into the air. Launches are rapid and gliders can climb to over 1600’ in under a minute. The basic costs are low. The winch does not cost as much as a tug to build or maintain. The time between launches can be as low as 5 minutes with a properly run operation.”³

And winch launching can be fun!!!!

Even if your club is not considering reinstating or starting winch launching, consider going to a nearby winch club and make some new friends.

Appendix A: Cable Cutting Advice Exemptions Issued

“In January 2005, several winch Clubs were issued with a GFA letter of exemption allowing them to continue to operate a winch in service at that time that was not fitted with a functional cabin operated emergency cable cutting device. Those clubs that are still active and operating a winch under this letter of exemption are:

- Adelaide University Gliding Club Inc
- Alice Springs Gliding Club Inc
- Balaklava Gliding Club Inc
- Bordertown-Keith Gliding Club Inc
- Bundaberg gliding inc.
- The Central Queensland Gliding Club Ltd
- The Geelong Gliding Club
- Grafton Gliding Club
- Grampians Soaring Club Inc
- Millicent Gliding Club
- North Queensland soaring centre inc.
- South Gippsland Gliding Club

The winch must be operated by the Club on the following conditions:

1. No alternative emergency cable cutting device or method requiring the winch driver to leave the safe confines of the cabin is to be provided;
2. Winch drivers are to be instructed that they are not expected to leave the cabin during a launch emergency whenever they are at risk of personal injury;
3. Winch drivers are to be instructed that in the case of a launch emergency they should shutdown the winch, leave the drum free to rotate and wait until all danger has passed; and
4. Pilots must be made aware, that during a launch emergency the winch cable will not be severed at the winch end.

The GFA letter of exemption is not transferrable. Clubs or Operators acquiring a winch subject to a letter of exemption cannot rely on the exemption and MUST fit a cabin operated cable-cutting device before introducing them into service.”⁴



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³ OPS 0004 Australian Gliding Knowledge

⁴ OPS 007 Winch Launching Manual section 4.4.1