

CALLBACK



From NASA's Aviation Safety Reporting System

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Let It Snow, Let It Snow...

During severe weather conditions, airport management's best snow-removal efforts can be defeated, even as maintenance crews scramble to keep ahead of the snow and ice accumulation on aircraft movement areas. In our first report, the snowplows had not yet arrived to clear the cargo ramp when an air carrier cargo crew tried to taxi without benefit of a clear path:

■ *Snow had been falling since mid-afternoon. The cargo ramp had not been plowed. There were 4-6 inches of snow on the ramp, with no markings visible. The only lights visible were two green centerline lights on the taxiway ahead of us, and there were no edge lights on the ramp. We taxied forward to where we believed we would be able to turn to runway 9. We tried to stay on what we believed to be the ramp. However, we had already taxied off the prepared surface but did not realize it. We were notified we were in the grass by ground personnel.*

We probably should have asked for a "follow me" truck or just stayed put.

As our reporter notes, seeking ground guidance is always a good idea if airport surfaces are not clearly visible or marked.

It's in the (Snow) Bank

Our next reporter, an air taxi Captain, was happy to find the runway well-plowed—but where did all that plowed snow end up? The Captain found out:

■ *The runway was snowplowed, with dry pavement and about 7-8 foot snowbanks. The width was NOTAMed at 60 feet wide, and was reported by the Airport Manager to be 60-70 feet wide. Our airplane has a wingspan of about 44 feet. On takeoff roll...there was an [engine] power surge which pulled the aircraft to the left. Upon correcting with right rudder and differential power, the plane went to the right and touched the right wing tip to the right side snowbank. I aborted the takeoff, [but] the aircraft spun to the right, hitting the nose and stopping with the nose and*

the left wing tip in the snowbank. Damage to the aircraft was to the nose radome, the skin behind the nose radome, and the nose landing gear linkage.

It turns out that the plowed area was offset five feet from the runway centerline. Without a normally-positioned centerline for reference, a pilot could easily line up slightly to one side, resulting in a similar incident, even without the problems of the asymmetrical power surge and the subsequent correction.

Life's a Beach

Once the airport surfaces have been plowed and the snow removed, the next step is sanding. In the next report, the airport maintenance crew did its job a little too well according to this First Officer, who landed on enough sand to start a beach.

■ *During preflight, our paperwork had a NOTAM reporting braking action poor by a B-737. ATIS reported ... runway plowed and sanded. Approach or Tower told us that braking action was [reported] fair-to-good by a previously arriving commuter. When we landed, there was almost no braking. The Captain used full reverse to decelerate. A large cloud of dust engulfed the airplane. So much dust filled the cabin [that] the flight attendants discussed evacuating the airplane.*

Prior to touchdown, I observed a lot of sand on the runway—perhaps enough to actually cause a reduction in traction. The temperature was 33°F—possibly causing ice melting and refreezing. Runway condition reporting is confusing. If we had known exactly how "poor" the runway was, we never would have attempted a landing.

The flight crew learned two days later that both engines needed to be replaced due to sand ingestion. A pilot's best defense against slippery landings is to prepare for the worst, which in this case meant making decisions according to the original "poor braking action" report from the B-737. ▲

Round-Robin Only Half-Legal

A general aviation pilot's return leg of a round-robin trip was cancelled when the airport manager closed the airport due to the snow and ice. However, later in the day when the sun came out, the pilot took it upon himself to rescind the closure. Not a good decision...

■ *The airport manager had gone home for the day, and I decided to go after a good look at the runway and a high-speed taxi on it. I decided the runway was safe and took off from an uncontrolled airport that was NOTAMed closed by the airport manager.*

I thought uncontrolled meant uncontrolled, but I was wrong. Just because an airport is uncontrolled, if it is NOTAMed closed, even without an "X" on the runway, you cannot take off or land. The airport manager called my manager, and I lost my job. I just hope I don't lose my pilot certificate over this.

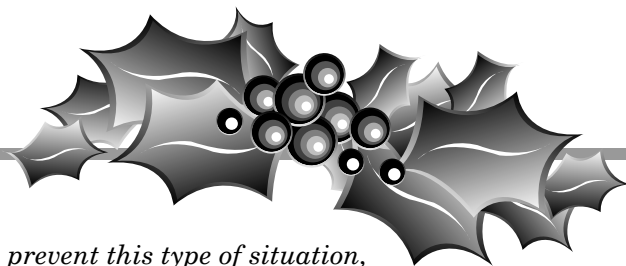
The painful lesson learned by our reporter: a pilot does not have the authority to re-open a closed airport. ▲

ASRS Recently Issued Alerts On.....
IFR/VFR traffic conflicts on a New York STAR
Taxiway lighting problems at an Alabama airport
Failure of coordination lights in a California Tower
Runway signage problems at a Pennsylvania airport
Inadequate obstruction lighting on a Michigan tower antenna

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September 1996 Report Intake	
Air Carrier Pilots	1760
General Aviation Pilots	770
Controllers	132
Cabin/Mechanics/Military/Other	46
TOTAL	2708

Holiday Hurry-Up



People in the aviation business may confront additional sources of the usual holiday stresses—some external, some self-imposed. Our first report provides a sample of the external frustrations encountered by Center controllers when faced with a blitz of holiday traffic, and how well the workload can be handled when the team works together:

■ *The airports were very busy with departures and arrivals. Weather was VFR in most of the sector...with frequency congestion at all times. The computer system had been changed so that flight plans would drop from the computer at 2 hours instead of the normal 3 hours because of the influx of traffic over the holidays. Equipment problems were abundant. Experimental equipment had been placed in the facility for communication help, but had not yet been certified for use. Also, the sector radar had been incorrectly certified and therefore was shut off, making the [nearby area] an area of non-radar coverage below 15,000 feet. For unknown reasons, [local] departure messages were not being forwarded to the Center computer system.*

It was extremely confusing because we Center controllers did not know when the local departures were coming to us. During all this chaos and many IFR operations, the other two controllers did a remarkable job of keeping up with all the traffic flow and effectively providing service to all aircraft.

Get-Homeitis

A general aviation pilot, on the last leg of a two-day cross-country trip, succumbed to some self-imposed holiday pressure. The reporter admitted to being “mentally and physically fatigued, and with a severe case of ‘get-homeitis’ due to the holiday.” When the weather did not cooperate with the pilot’s holiday plans, all the pre-flight planning—and the fuel reserves—went down the drain.

■ *My weather briefing had forecast quartering tailwinds, which unfortunately were not the case. The winds had shifted to a direct headwind, blowing strong. The fuel tanks were reading a quarter-full. According to the flight time and the fuel gauges, I believed I had plenty of fuel to reach my destination. I was about 10-12 miles from home, and 2 miles past Airport A. As I experienced more turbulence, I noticed my fuel gauges were reading lower than moments before, and my engine began to run rough. I turned toward Airport A, then suddenly my engine stopped. The restart attempt was a failure, so I called Airport A and declared an emergency. A normal approach to landing was performed, coasting to the side of the runway to wait to be assisted off by a tug.*

To prevent this type of situation, always allow more time, be prepared to make an extra fuel stop, keep a current weather update, and never allow “get-homeitis” to push you and your airplane into a situation you may regret.

ASRS receives many reports on this subject, but get-homeitis during the holidays may be more pronounced than at other times of the year. The added factor of unexpected winds and weather increases the potential for incidents or accidents. ▲



Football Field Follies

A familiar autumnal locale—the campus football field—was at the heart of an ASRS reporter's troubles.

■ *[During a photography flight], the chief architect requested that we circle a nearby campus and take photos of a new building and football field he had built there recently. I deviated north and circled the campus. Not having planned for this deviation, I did not check the exact distance from XYZ airport, but judged it to be more than 5 miles. The campus is actually 4 miles from XYZ airport according to the sectional chart. When we were finished, I resumed my course toward ABC. ABC Approach told me that XYZ Tower wanted to talk to me...as I had entered XYZ airspace without prior permission. ABC Ground gave me a second message to call them on the telephone.*

At the time, I didn't want to distract my attention long enough to look up XYZ frequency. In hindsight, I should obviously have called XYZ Tower.

Good operating practice would suggest consulting a sectional chart for the area and, as the reporter notes, letting the Tower know that the aircraft's location is close to Class D airspace. ▲