FAA ALASKAN FLYER

Aviation news from the FAA Alaskan Region
Flight Standards Division

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Pilot Skill: To Fly or Not to Fly

Ken A. Thomas
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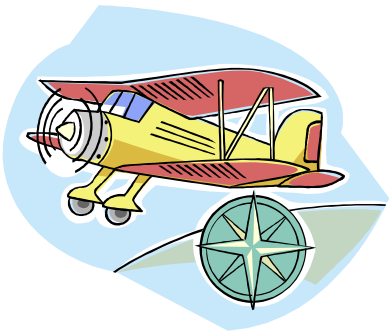
The busy 2005 flying season is upon us and I would like to take this opportunity to address some important issues involving aviation in the state of Alaska. As we all know, Alaska offers some of the greatest experiences aviators can have, but along with those experiences comes the requirement for a higher level of awareness of our responsibility. This article is written specifically to address the accidents in Alaska and point out some areas, which will have a direct effect in reducing the chances of an accident happening to you.

The Medallion Foundation and the FAA Alaskan Region conducted a study of accidents involving privately owned aircraft, operated under FAR Part 91, and over a five-year period from 1999 to 2004. These accidents were sorted using the NTSB data available on the NTSB website and, it was decided, that this particular study would exclude floatplane accidents. There were 144 accidents in wheel-equipped airplanes. Seventy-seven of those accidents showed skill-based pilot error. Now, before your hackles get up and you feel that "pilot error" is the world's biggest mystery box, where all accidents go that don't have any other identifiable cause, let me say that none of these accidents were fatal and the cause was taken from the airman's statements. In this group of 77 accidents there are 3 distinct categories: First, the pilot landed long, short, left or right of the intended touchdown point. Second, the pilot did not adequately compensate for a crosswind. Third, the pilot lost directional control of the airplane after touchdown. (It should be noted here that a large portion of these accidents were at unimproved locations, the very reason we choose to live and fly in Alaska!)



Let's consider skill for a moment. Skill is one of those things that just doesn't fit in a box. It is something that accumulates over time yet diminishes rapidly if not used. We attain skill by receiving instruction, develop skill with practice, and test skill by either hiring a critical second set of eyes or on the hard Alaskan turf. A lot of the time we consider our skill to be sufficient based on the successful outcome of an event, but is that really good enough? How hard did you work to hit the spot of intended touchdown? Are you trembling? Is your respiration rate up? Are you sweating? Ok, so it's a gravel bar and somewhat rougher than the strip at home. If the above is true you did not spend enough time preparing for this operation and are operating near the outside edge of your skill level. So often in aviation we have to, "take the test, before we learn the lesson" (John King). It is easy to go out and depend on the skill level of days gone by only to find that those skills have diminished with disuse and the task at hand requires more than we can give. Back to the 77 accidents, the number of flight hours logged varied from several hundred to many thousands; none were considered "new" pilots.

So then, how do we fix the problem? I'll offer a couple suggestions to spark your imagination. Get in touch with a local Certified Flight Instructor; the benefits are immeasurable. It shouldn't be too hard to find a CFI who can meet your needs and special interests as an airman. The FAR's require a session with a CFI every two years, which could be adequate if the time is spent focused on something, not looked upon as a legal requirement to suffer through. Flying with an instructor will always be beneficial, if you take their critiques and suggestions with an open mind. In my experience they are a group of folks who are truly there to help you and as mentioned before their backgrounds are varied so

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Inside this issue:

Summer Greeting's from your FAA Safety Team!

The busy flying season is upon us and the Alaskan Region Flight Standards is more committed than ever to provide you with information to make this flying season our safest yet. Alaska offers great aviation experiences, but along with those, there is a need for a heightened awareness. In an outreach effort to connect with out Part 91 pilots, we have put together a packet for our general aviation pilots. The packet is free and filled with great CD's, DVD's and safety information. This packet addresses some important issues involving aviation in Alaska that can reduce your risk of an aviation mishap.

- **Some facts to consider as you prepare for your next adventure:**
  - Half of the accidents in Alaska involve skill-based pilot error when attempting to land.
    - Pilot landed long, short, left or right of the intended touchdown point
    - Pilot did not adequately compensate for a crosswind, or
    - Pilot lost directional control of the airplane after touchdown, and
    - Many of these accidents were at unimproved (off-airport) locations
  - The best ways to improve pilot skill is to:
    - Receive extra instruction from a Certified Flight Instructor (CFI) skilled in your special interest area
    - Practice in a simulated environment at the Medallion Foundation for free
    - Contact your local Aviation Safety Program Manager, who can put you in contact with these and other quality resources
  - Other ways to reduce risk before flight are to:
    - Set personal minimums
    - Get all weather information, including a review of applicable weather cameras on the internet

We have enclosed for you in this packet:

Making Your Own Rules CD: This CD helps a pilot identify risks; set personal minimums for your skill level; and create your own personal checklist tailored to your skills and experience.

Weather Wise: This CD is an interactive CD-ROM designed to improve VFR pilots' weather-related decision-making skills. Select the VFR cross- country flight to Bethel and put your skills to the test!

Flat Light: This CD deals with Flat Light conditions, while not unique to Alaska, is prevalent throughout our state and can be very hazardous.

License To Learn: An excellent DVD produced by our friends at Transport Canada, which is specific to floatplanes and the unique problems they encounter.

Also enclosed are some other publications that we hope you take the time to read, and pass on to a friend.

If you happen to see a pilot flying around your area from the lower 48, take a moment to introduce yourself and offer the benefit of your local Alaskan flying knowledge, you may make a new friend, but more importantly, you may save lives!

To receive this free general aviation packet, contact your local Safety Program Manager.

The FAA Alaskan Region wish you best regards for a safe flight

Remember to enroll your e-mail address on the FAA Safety Program's exciting new website www.FAASafety.gov for information, articles, safety programs in your area, and much, much more!

www.faasafety.gov

What Message Is Sent When We Honor Our Fallen Aviators?

David Karalunas
Safety Program Manager (A/W), Fairbanks FSDO

The March/April issue of *Water Flying*, the official magazine of the Seaplane Pilots Association (SPA), had an article that got me thinking about our aviation community, and I'd like to share those thoughts with you.

I was immediately drawn to the photo with SPA's 2005 Pilot of the Year article (a smiling woman standing next to a floatplane), as much for the Cessna 172, which is what I fly, as for the chance to share an inspiring female aviation role model with my wife, who soloed over 20 years ago and renewed her Student Pilot certificate last year, but hasn't yet gone up with an instructor. My interest turned to unease by the end of the first paragraph, where Kathy Hodgkins, the award recipient, was referred to in the past tense. For the next ten paragraphs, I hoped to find that Kathy had passed away from natural causes, or that she'd been the innocent victim of a car accident, that she'd met any fate - anything - except having died in an aircraft accident while pilot in command. My hopes were soon dashed. Kathy died on a flight to pick up a charter customer in August of 2004, in what appears to be a Controlled Flight Into Terrain (CFIT) accident. By the article's end, I was both saddened and angry at this senseless loss of one who appeared so deserving of life, and at the missed opportunity to send the right message to the aviation community about Kathy's accident.

Although these thoughts are my own, I am fortunate to work for the FAA as an Aviation Safety Inspector and Safety Program Manager. I've benefited from hundreds of hours of focused training, including accident investigation, risk management, human factors, and system safety. I've investigated accidents, analyzed them for trends, and spent many hours on teams looking for root causes. Kathy, who flew DC-10s, 757s, and 767s for Continental, must have had some similar experience in her Part 121 pilot training. During my own Alaska Part 135 maintenance career, I've had morning coffee with coworkers, seemingly good pilots and highly intelligent guys, who never came back from their last flights. My flying club lost a good father and pilot in one mid-air; I lost a flight instructor in another. And my wife lost a friend after strongly suggesting he not take a part-time job with a certain operator as a new Part 135 pilot. All of this has reinforced the fact that any of us can become a statistic, if we let ourselves. I did many years ago, severely damaging my plane as a direct result of my own poor decisions. I had just over 100 hours back then, yet Kathy had more than 14,000 hours, including perhaps a few hundred hours a year instructing and flying charters in Cessna 172 and 180 floatplanes that she operated in a business with her husband, Timothy Hodgkins. We must wait on the NTSB's final report for the probable cause(s) in Kathy's accident. Meanwhile, Timothy's description (the article says he believes she didn't see the mountain because of low clouds and reduced visibility) and the preliminary report (ID# IAD04LA036 at www.ntsb.gov) match my personal experience; that Kathy's likely was another completely preventable "accident."

A pilot colleague once told me that she wasn't a big fan of Amelia Earhart. She felt there were other women pilots who had equal or greater accomplishments, as well as long, successful careers that didn't end in mystery or mishap. Why are we so quick to honor our aviation dead, and less so our aviation survivors? It doesn't have anything to do with aviation. We honor the positive memories of charismatic people like Kathy or Amelia with our laurels, and, in the anguish of the moment, we seek to soothe the loved ones left behind. But we do a disservice to remaining aviators with these well-intentioned acts.

In FAA accident investigation training, it is strongly emphasized that we inspectors never do or say anything to disparage the character of a deceased person. Kathy Hodgkins, and many others whom we've lost in aviation, by all accounts were good people. Yet we humans are all capable of making mistakes and bad decisions. We all have to recognize and mitigate that while flying and maintaining our aircraft, with good training, diligent use of sound procedures and checklists, and better aeronautical decision-making.

Kathy's accident reminded me of John and Martha King asking an audience at Sun 'n' Fun this year to raise a hand if they knew anyone who had died in an aircraft accident. Far too many people raised their hands. The Kings told of the "Big Lie," that the general aviation flight is safer than the drive to the airport. We expect similar aviation inaccuracies from mainstream media, and I've often let those go by without comment. I've even said things like the Big Lie myself, to ease the mind of a passenger. It is far worse, though, even deadly, to lie to ourselves. We should honor the Kathys of aviation while they live, or in due time after sufficient reflection, but not just after they were lost in an accident. Until we can look each other in the eye and recognize our decision errors for what they are, we will continue to sacrifice our own without learning from their final lessons.

It's a fact that 67 percent of all aviation accidents in Alaska occur on take off or landing. Before you take off this summer, there are things you can do to increase your odds of a safer return. For starters, brush up your flying skills, have your aircraft inspected, and of course, before you fly be sure to check the weather, conduct a pre-flight inspection and file a flight plan.

Double-check your skills

General aviation pilots, guides, corporate pilots and lodge operators can participate in the Medallion Flyer Program. This free program promotes safer flying in Alaska through increased awareness, prudent risk management and documented maintenance procedures. The Medallion Foundation also offers free flight simulator sessions in Anchorage, Fairbanks and Juneau, in order for pilots to brush up on their skills prior to flying. To schedule your simulator session at any of these locations, call (907) 743-8050 or go to www.medallionfoundation.org for more details.

SELF
Are you prepared?

AIRCRAFT
Is your aircraft properly maintained and prepared?

FLIGHT
Is your flight planned and filed?

ENVIRONMENT
Have you checked the weather?

Certified flight instructors are also available to assist pilots and to practice essential skills for flying in Alaska. For more information, call the FAA at (907) 271-5514.

Double check your aircraft

The FAA offers many safety seminars to aid pilots in caring for and maintaining their aircraft. FAA inspectors are often available to check out an aircraft, free of charge. Aircraft inspections are especially crucial after a long winter or an extended period of inactivity. Contact the FAA to arrange your aircraft inspection at (907) 271-5514.

ASAP Programs Kicks Off

Medallion Foundation

On May 3rd, 2005 the Medallion Aviation Safety Action Program (ASAP) got officially underway when the documents were signed by the FAA and the first participant, Warbelow's Air Ventures. This is the first time that the FAA has allowed a third party or organization to administer the program

"It is exciting to move beyond the development stage and have the program up and running" said Jerry Dennis the Executive Director.

The program, in nutshell, offers immunity to individuals from FAA sanctions or company discipline in exchange for full disclosure of all the surrounding information concerning an occurrence. There are exceptions to the immunity, of course for intentional disregard for safety or use of alcohol or drugs. So if a pilot, for example, missed an assigned altitude he/she could report it at the ASAP program. Detailed information related to the event would be reviewed by a committee set up by the ASAP process. They would make recommendations to the company management on possible improvements in procedures, policy, or training at the company. The Medallion Foundation will track and trend this safety information and share it (after it is de-identified) with other participating carriers. In this way, we all can get the maximum benefit of the safety information. Currently the program is only open to pilots but expect to expand it to cover mechanics and eventually certified dispatchers as well.

The program has been very successful with FAR 121 carriers nationwide. We expect to gain a lot of same benefits through consolidation of several smaller carriers under the Medallion umbrella. An organization which can 'learn' from minor events is much more likely to avoid the major events which sooner or later will happen if the system is not fixed. This one of the underlying principles on which the Medallion Foundation was established and why we are excited about the possibilities of the ASAP process.

(L-R) Dalton Fortney, FAA; Angela Elgee, FAA; John Duncan, FAA; Richard Harding, Medallion Foundation; Art Warbelow, Warbelow's Air Ventures; Kent Adams, Medallion Foundation; Jerry Dennis, Medallion Foundation

Several other Medallion participants have expressed interest in the ASAP program and we are scheduling the required training to bring those carriers into the program. If you would like more information about how ASAP could help your company contact Jerry Dennis at the Medallion Foundation office. We would like to see lots of participants in the beneficial program.

Epitaph Echoes

Kieran O'Farrell
Regional Safety Program Manager

Occasionally in the Flyer, we will print *'last words'*. Words that were captured on cockpit voice recorders. The intent here is not to be grim, but rather to learn from those who want to teach us the lessons, they painfully learned. Listen to your internal warning system; listen to unusual or unsettled cautions from your husband, wife, friend, or your flight crew. When there is an uneasy feeling, there is ***always*** a reason.

January 13, 1982
Washington D.C.
Air Florida, Flight 90
Boeing B-737-222
N62AF

The aircraft crashed into the 14th St. bridge and the Potomac River and sank shortly after taking off from Washington National Airport. The aircraft reached a peak altitude of 300 ft. The flight crew's failure to use the engine anti-icing system during takeoff. Failure to de-ice the plane a second time before takeoff and taking off with snow/ice on the airfoil surfaces of the aircraft. Ice which accumulated on the engine pressure probes resulted in erroneously high Engine Pressure Ratio (EPR) readings. When the throttles were set to takeoff EPR, the engines were actually developing significantly less than takeoff thrust. Seventy-four out of 79 aboard killed.

CA = Captain
F/O = First Officer
TWR = Tower

15:59:16	**CA**	**Given**
15:59:16	**F/O**	**Bleeds?**
15:59:17	**CA**	**They're off.**
15:59:18	**F/O**	**Strobes, external lights.**
15:59:18	**CA**	**On.**
15:59:19	**F/O**	**Anti-skid?**
15:59:19	**CA**	**On.**
15:59:21	**F/O**	**Transponder?**
15:59:21	**CA**	**On.**
15:59:24	**TWR**	**Palm 90 cleared for takeoff.**
15:59:28	**TWR**	**No delay on departure if you will, traffic's two and a half out for the runway.**
15:59:32	**CA**	**Okay, your throttles.**
15:59:35	**[Sound of engine spool-up]**	
15:59:49	**CA**	**Holler if you need the wipers.**
15:59:51	**CA**	**It's spooled. Real cold, real cold.**
15:59:58	**F/O**	**God, look at that thing. That don't seem right, does it? Uh, that's not right.**
16:00:09	**CA**	**Yes it is, there's eighty.**
16:00:10	**F/O**	**Naw, I don't think that's right. Ah, maybe it is.**
16:00:21	**CA**	**CAM-1 Hundred and twenty.**
16:00:23	**F/O**	**CAM-2 I don't know**
16:00:31	**CA**	**Vee-one. Easy, vee-two**
16:00:39	**[Sound of stick shaker starts and continues until impact]**	
16:00:41	**TWR**	**Palm 90 contact departure control.**
16:00:45	**CA**	**Forward, forward, easy. We only want five hundred.**
16:00:48	**CA**	**Come on forward...forward, just barely climb.**
16:00:59	**CA**	**Stalling, we're falling!**
16:01:00	**F/O**	**Larry, we're going down, Larry**
16:01:01	**CA**	**I know it.**
16:01:01	**[Sound of impact]**	

Last year we had the safest year in over 20 years. This year, we are experiencing a number of incidents and accidents. Half of the accidents in Alaska involve skill-based pilot error accidents such as, landing short, left or right of the intended touchdown point, not adequately compensating for a crosswind, and losing directional control after touchdown. Many of these accidents were at unimproved (off airport) locations.

This past Fourth of July, Alaska experienced six accidents and four incidents. Tragically enough, one of the accidents resulted in three fatalities from South Carolina. What can you do to help reverse this trend?

- Ø Receive extra instruction from a Certified Flight Instructor (CFI) skilled in your special interest area.
- Ø Practice in a simulated environment at the Medallion Foundation, it's FREE!
- Ø Set realistic personal minimums that allow for turning around before it is too late.
- Ø Get all weather information, including a review of applicable weather cameras on the Internet. (http://akweathercams.faa.gov/)
- Ø File a flight plan-ALWAYS.

(Continued from page 1)

someone will have what you need. Another option is to get in touch with an Aviation Safety Counselor who specializes in your area of concern. Contact your local Aviation Safety Program Manager, who will be able to put you in contact with these quality resources. Nothing, absolutely nothing, can take the place of practice. I'm not talking about bland traffic pattern work that meets the minimum standard set forth in the Practical Test Standard book. I'm talking about focused, rigid, tight tolerance practice. If it is landings you are working on you need a clearly defined box in which to land. You need to land inside that box in various wind conditions on several different days and the box should be no bigger than the box you plan to land in when you go fishing or hunting. You need to get some of that huffing and puffing done at home so that you do not find yourself beyond your limits in the field.

Another area of concern is Controlled Flight Into Terrain (CFIT). Alaska weather is the very epitome of unforgiveness, yet we often accept the risk and proceed with barred teeth and a giant pucker. Some wind up unforgiven. This is a small percentage of accidents in Alaska but nearly all are FATAL. These accidents are nearly always preventable and are caused by insufficient weather information on preflight, airmen proceeding into worsening weather conditions, and a lack of skill in emergency escapement from the weather. Careful preflight planning, avoidance of risky situations, smothering of "get-home-itis", and practice, practice, practice under the hood for unavoidable circumstances will save your life when the chips are down.

It takes approximately 1 hour to learn the fundamentals of flying.

It takes a lifetime to know when not to fly.

Accidents happen, and as long as there are humans in machines, this won't change, but here's a thought. Maybe the time has come for us to take an honest look at the privileges we exercise when we are participating in aviation. Let's face it; in the United States the pilot in command privileges are broad, so broad that it is often easier to be legal than prudent. We are on our own to determine the effect of "Human Factors" on any flight for which we assume responsibility. The Federal Aviation Regulations address careless and reckless operations in aircraft and as airmen we tend to think of this in legal terms i.e., three landings in 90 days, one mile visibility in class G airspace, don't taxi onto a runway without a clearance, and so forth. Wait a minute, shouldn't landing on a gravel bar that is 20 feet wide and 500 feet long be considered careless when the last landing was 75 days ago on the ski strip at International? How about this, you plan a flight in marginal weather, you proceed into lowering conditions, you know this route, in fact you know the secret way through the pass, but the last time you were under a hood was 23 months ago on your biennial flight review. Isn't that careless? No, when measured by the "letter of the law." Yes, when measured by "prudence says so." Every year I watch something that is just phenomenal. There is a certain Super Cub, on a certain ramp in Alaska that seems to be on a very predictable schedule. Right around the first of October the skis go on, the airplane seldom moves throughout the winter, then the snow melts. I watch for activity, it's mid-July and the wing covers are flapping in the wind and the skis are contacting the hot, soft asphalt. Thirty-inch Bushwheels appear on the axles about the first week of August and the plane disappears for a couple of weeks during sheep season. The question of proficiency arises every time I see this happen. I have done everything short of sending the dreaded certified letter to the owner to try to get acquainted. All I can say is that if care is not taken in the area of pilot skills then we better widen our limitations to blue skies and runways hundreds of feet wide and thousands of feet long or not fly at all until we are willing or able to properly take on our responsibilities.

In closing this article I think it important to salute those who have operated safely for many years in Alaska. There is no doubt in my mind that there are many of you who take this thing seriously and actually know your own specific limitations. It has been my pleasure to know and work with some of the best pilots on the face of the earth, right here in Alaska. It is also important to note that as pilots we should not be paranoid about what we do. There is risk involved here, but having a proper plan for our activities can mitigate that risk. What we should have as pilots is an honest answer to the question that is constantly before us, "Have I done everything possible to prepare myself for what I am doing right now?" If the answer is anything other than an emphatic yes, then we need to cancel the mission. Just think of the effect the article in the newspaper about the accident will have on you and your loved ones if you can't honestly give the appropriate answer. It is no longer popular to live through an airplane crash, let alone die in one. Gone are the days in Alaska when folks shrugged their shoulders and accepted aviation accidents as a fact of life. When you add up emotional trauma, search and rescue, aircraft rebuild, loss of life or limb, and other negative aspects, it builds a strong case for preparatory measures to be taken to enjoy flying in this wonderful place.

Thank you all for taking the time to read this article, have a safe and enjoyable season.

(DONT) Kick the Tires & Light the Fires

Mike Halloran
FAA Aviation Safety Inspector

What's certified for the speeds of a racecar, is expected to survive instant acceleration, carry the load of an 18-wheeler, but is as small as the wheel on a go-cart? Your aircraft tires!

One of the most important parts of an aircraft, and the most overlooked on preflight, are your aircraft tires. In this month's article I will explain a little on aircraft tire considerations in hopes that it will cause you to think about them a little more when performing your next preflight inspection.

Three things to remember about tires are as follows:

First, it's important to know just what a typical aircraft tire is subject to in its daily life of service.

A. Load: A couple of runway landings would probably blow out a typical automobile tire if it were mounted onto an airplane. Aircraft tires are designed to handle at least 16 times their static load imposed on them and three times the speed of a comparably sized car tire.

B. Distortion: The aircraft tire carcass is designed to distort and flex up to 30 percent during normal operation. This is similar to driving straight into a curb at 50 M.P.H. every time you'd park the family sedan.

C. Operational Consideration: Did you know that fast taxi speeds are as stressing to a tire as "cowboy" landings (bouncing it in)? The tire can build up internal temperatures of as much as 150 degrees inside the casing, with under-inflation adding up another 100 degrees. That chirping sound you hear when you land is the sound of treads flattening while accelerating from 0 to whatever your landing speed is!

Consequently, there is no bad aircraft tire. All are designed and constructed to FAA Technical Standard Order C 62 B-D. Each aircraft tire is handmade and individually tested to at least these specifications.

Second is the preflight. Now that we've covered some of the stresses and basics that aircraft tires are subject to, let's go over some preflight items that are important to check:

A. Take a look at the general "roundness" of the tire. I know that this sounds pretty basic, but it's important. Are there any "flat spots"? There are two types of "flat spots" to tires, and the type that's not very well known happens when an aircraft has been parked for a considerable amount of time. The weight of a plane constantly pushing down on one portion of the tire can cause it to form into a "D" shape rather than an "O". A properly inflated tire, operated under normal temperatures, will work this kink out. However, if the tire pressure is low, that flat spot will only accentuate a bad condition and could cause the tire to fail.

B. The other type of "flat spot" that we're most familiar with is from overzealous brake usage. Small flat spots don't pose much of a hazard, but spots that have gone past the tread groove (not the first sign of chord) should be replaced before flight. Heat is concentrated at this spot causing a "weak link" around the tire and below the grooves is proven to be unsafe. Additionally, this is even more of an issue with a re-treaded tire.

C. The sidewall of the tire should be inspected as well. Remember, the brake rotor (including the caliper assembly) is only a few inches away from the sidewall and is dissipating heat while trying to stop the plane. Some of this is being absorbed by the sidewall of the tire. Heavy braking during landing can cause a rotor to glow red and "burn" the sidewall. Look for signs of burning when inspecting the sidewall of the tire.

D. Your tire could be holding air perfectly, and still be under inflated! Why? Your tires might be fine on that hot August day before winging off to your favorite pancake breakfast, but in December could turn out to be a drag. An important fact to remember is that for every 5 degrees F (3 degrees C) change in temperature will result in a corresponding 1% change in tire pressure. Tire inflation is the most critical element of the life of the tire and it's important to follow the manufacturer's recommendations for tire pressure of a particular model. Under-inflation produces uneven tread wear and shortens tire life because of excessive flex heating. Over-inflation can cause uneven tread wear, reduced traction, make the tread more susceptible to cutting and increase stress on aircraft wheels. Only dry nitrogen should be used to fill the tire as it will not sustain combustion and will reduce oxidation.

E. Aside from the actual tire, it's important to take a look at the wheel bolts that hold the wheel together. Are they tight in their holes? Is there any chafing or stressing? If there are any problems with them don't operate the aircraft until it is repaired.

Third, remember, a more careful look at the tires before the next time you fly could prevent an undesirable occurrence.

State Owned Precision Approach Slope Indicator (PAPI) at Five Airports

Carl Siebe
Airports Engineer, Alaska DOT & PF

Last fall the State DOT&PF was made aware that we had obstructions in the approach to one of our airports served by a State owned Precision Approach Slope Indicator (PAPI). Most of the PAPI and Visual Approach Slope Indicator (VASI) systems in Alaska are owned and operated by the FAA. However four airports have state owned PAPI systems and one has a state owned VASI system. The airports are located in Klawock, Kake, Hoonah, Haines, and Skagway. A review of all five airports indicated potential problems at all, so in the interest of air safety we turned off these light systems. It would have been irresponsible to leave the lights in service and have a pilot follow the lights into a tree or obstruction.

Since the PAPIs were turned off, we have been working to secure the data to turn them on again. Surveys of the obstructions were completed in December 2004 and January 2005, and the survey information has been sent to the FAA specialists for evaluation and recommendations. When this review is complete we hope to be able to turn on some of the lights. The goal is to have PAPIs turned on again by fall of 2005 where it is safe to do so. Preliminary review indicates that some of the systems may never meet FAA standards, and those systems will be decommissioned. Some of the systems may be returned to service if the offending obstructions are cleared or if special limits are set on the use of the PAPI lights such as increasing the approach slope angle or limiting the protected horizontal distance. (For an example please review the Nome runway 20 VASI restrictions in the Alaska Supplement.) In a separate work effort the DOT&PF is also working with FAA to transfer the usable PAPI systems to the FAA Airway Facilities Division for future maintenance and ownership.

Recommissioning of the PAPI is strictly a safety issue and will not be done until it is safe to do so. Please call Carl Siebe, Airports Engineer with the Alaska DOT&PF at 269-0725 if you have any questions.

Fishing Season opens in Alaska

"They will pressure you into doing things that may be unsafe, use your good judgment, and remember, I would rather be laughed at, than cried for".

–George Mac Donald

Potential Alaskan Runway Incursion!

Local Pilot's Page

Underwater Egress Training

Burke Wick
Alaskan Pilot

There is only one way to put it. **Underwater egress training saved my life and the life of my wife.** My wife and I were involved in a floatplane incident. The plane impacted the water, flipped over and sank immediately.

Several years ago I had the opportunity to take a underwater egress training program that was offered locally by the Coast Guard and the FAA. The training consisted of a classroom session and pool session. The instructors tried to convey to the group attending that winding up in the water in an aircraft was very disorienting and frightening. I cannot tell you what an understatement this is. All of your senses are running in overdrive. The noise of the impact is ringing in your ears. Anything that was loose in the cockpit is flying around. You cannot see. The other person in the plane might be panicking a little and grabbing and pulling on you. Now you're upside down without a chance to take a breath before you went under.

The instructors attempted to covey all of this. They stressed the importance of having a reference point and focusing on it and here is the hard part...waiting so that your actions can have a chance of succeeding. It does no good to push on the door until the plane is completely flooded, it won't move.

I remembered all of this at the moment that it counted. As my head went under water, I was able to grab my reference point, which happens to be the top latch on the door (my aircraft had two latches on the door). As the plane rolled, I released my harness and grabbed the other door latch. I was then able to push the door open and get out. My wife (who had not had the training) was disoriented and trying to get out the side of the plane with no door. I was able to grab the back of her survival vest and pull her out of the plane backwards. We were not able to retrieve our small dog from the wreck and suspect that she was killed on impact. Witnesses on shore said that this all took about 30 seconds. I have no idea how long it took. Another floatplane came to our aid within about 4 minutes. You know who you are... saying thank you is not enough.

If you fly in Alaska on floats or wheels for that matter, I cannot stress strongly enough how important underwater egress training is. I absolutely believe that if one of us had not had the training that we would not have survived the event. If you haven't taken it, take it. If you have taken it...take it again. I know I will...and so will my wife.

One last thing, wear a inflatable flotation vest such as a Sterns with critical survival gear in the pockets. You can only count on getting out of the plane with what you are wearing. Any survival gear in the cargo compartment is just camping gear and it will sink with the plane.

And a big thank you to all the FAA and Coast Guard people and the Alaskan Aviation Safety Foundation, who put this training on. I know of two lives you can take credit for saving.

Note from the Regional Safety Program Manager (RSPM)

Kieran O'Farrell

The Alaskan Region FAA, the Coast Guard, and the Alaska Aviation Safety Foundation, all the people involved in bringing this training to our pilots, are certainly euphoric and humbled by this testament. But it is pilots like this gentleman, that take time out of their busy lives to attend this kind of non-mandatory training, that involves a pre-pool briefing and a pool session, makes a difference. The fact that this gentleman attended this training and the fact that both were actually wearing life vests empowered him to save himself and his wife. Please keep that in mind the next time you hear that egress training is offered in your area or any safety seminar. We all lead such busy lives, but a moment changes all things. Training can save your life.

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