

# 2023 Soaring Accident Summary

By Soaring Safety Foundation Trustees

For the twelve-month period ending October 31, 2023, five (5) gliders and six (6) motor-gliders were involved in eleven (11) separate accidents that met the reporting requirements of NTSB, 49 CFR 830. This represents a 60.7% decrease in the number of accidents reported during the previous 12 month reporting period. The five-year average for the FY19 – FY23 reporting period is 21.2 accidents per year, representing a 14.5% decrease in the average number of accidents from the previous five-year period.

While the average number of accidents per year has shown a steady decline since 1981 (averaging 45.6/year in the 80's, 38.6/year in the 90's, 33.5/year in the 00's, 25.5/year for the 10's, and 21.0 /year for this decade) the number of accidents each year remains too high.

In addition, the average number of fatalities has remained nearly constant, at just under 6 per year since the mid 1990's and is also considered too high. In the FY23 reporting period, one (1) accident resulted in fatal injuries to one (1) pilot. In addition, two (2) pilots received serious injuries while ten (10) pilots and passengers received minor or no injuries in these ten (10) non-fatal accidents.

While the number of accidents reported to the NTSB is easy to track (Figure 1), and that number has been declining for both Gliders, and General Aviation as a whole, it is important that this number must be combined with flight hours or launches to determine the accident rate. Several years ago the SSF Trustees began asking all soaring organizations (clubs, chapters, commercial operators) to submit their flight times/launches in a confidential manner. This is done by mailing postcards to the organizations' representative listed in the SSA's database. For the past six (6) years approximately 30% of the organizations have returned these postcards. In January 2024, another mailing occurred, readers of this article are encouraged ask their organization to respond. Getting better data via soaring organizations confidentially reporting this data will help clarify this situation.

A review of the fatal accident showed that the pilot of an ASH-26E motor-glider in Colorado was fatally injured after it impacted terrain in a 77 deg nose down attitude for unknown reasons. This fatal accident is still under investigation by the NTSB, and the full report is available at (<http://www.soaringsafety.org/accidentprev/ssfreports.html>).

Unlike previous years, the NTSB aviation accident database is up to date with completed or preliminary descriptions of the eleven (11) accident that occurred during this reporting period.

In FY23 five (5) landing accidents represented 45% of all accidents. Three out of five (60%) of the landing accidents occurred while the pilot was attempting to land at an airport, while the other 2 (40%) occurred while attempting an off-field landings. Details of these accidents are given in the full report.

The SSF trustees were pleased, but surprised, to find no launch accidents (PT3 accidents) in FY23. We have no insights into as to why, but we encourage the community to continue this trend by using checklists and proper pre-launch planning to prepare for an unexpected termination of the tow on every flight. There were four (4) cruise flight accidents in FY23. Two (2) of them involved in-flight

vibrations that caused structural damage to the aircraft. Details on these accidents will be given in the full report.

There were six (6) motor-gliders involved in accidents during the FY23 reporting period. See the full report for more details.

While this significant reduction in accidents is good news, the Soaring Safety Foundation encourages each and every individual to be constantly aware of and manage their own personal risk factors as they fly gliders and towplanes. This includes using the IMSAFE checklist and maintaining our flying proficiency not just our flying currency. We highly encourage the use of the FAA WINGS program when complying with the FAR 61.56 Flight Review requirement. We must collectively continue to monitor the safety culture that exists in the club or commercial operation we fly at, remembering that **WE** are the safety culture. Please adopt the mantra "If you SEE something, SAY something" to your clubs BOD, Safety Officer or Owner. Having a Safety Culture that works means that every individual needs to participate. Lets strive for fewer accidents and zero fatalities in 2024!

The Soaring Safety Foundation continues to provide tools for your location to enhance safety. We offer an anonymous Site Survey that gives your operation an objective look at how you are doing. We also offer Safety Seminars at your location as a part of our ongoing commitment to safety. Our Flight Instructor Refresher Courses (FIRC) allow ANY certified Flight Instructor to renew their certificate in a highly interactive in-person format. More information on these and our growing collection of on-line safety and training programs can be found on our website. <http://www.soaringsafety.org>

