

2024 Soaring Accident Summary

By Soaring Safety Foundation Trustees

For the twelve-month period ending October 31, 2024, twelve (12) gliders, seven (7) motor-gliders, one (1) light sport glider, and one (1) towplane were involved in twenty-one (21) separate accidents that met the reporting requirements of NTSB, 49 CFR 830. One mid-air accident accounts for the 22 aircraft being involved in 21 accidents. This represents a 91% increase in the number of accidents reported during the previous 12 month reporting period. The five-year average for the FY20 – FY24 reporting period is 21 accidents per year, representing a 1% 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.

The good news is that the average number of fatal accidents is starting to show a small decline over the past 5 years, decreasing from 6.0/year to 5.5/year in FY2024. However, that is still considered too high and more needs to be done to reduce fatal accidents. In the FY24 reporting period, two (2) accidents resulted in fatal injuries to the accident pilots. In addition, four (4) pilots received serious injuries while eighteen (18) pilots and passengers received minor or no injuries in these nineteen (19) 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 organization's representative listed in the SSA's database. For the past seven (7) years approximately 30% of the organizations have returned these postcards.

In January 2025, 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. In addition, the SSF began a real-time collection process capturing the number of participating gliders, the number of launches and flight time data using the Open Glider Network system. A table showing year-to-date, and weekly data has been added to our web site

<http://www.soaringsafety.org>.

A review of the fatal accidents shows that the pilot of an ASH-26E motor-glider in Ohio was fatally injured after it impacted terrain in a steep nose down attitude during an aborted aerotow launch. The pilot of a Merlin Lite Light Sport glider was fatally injured after impacting terrain after entering a stall/spin condition after the engine quit during a self-launch. These fatal accidents are still under investigation by the NTSB, and the full report is available at (<http://www.soaringsafety.org/accidentprev/ssfreports.html>).

As with previous years, the NTSB aviation accident database is missing data on seven (7) of these twenty-one (21) accidents. Details will be included in future reports and in FIRC presentations as that data is made available.

In FY24 seven (7) landing accidents represented 33% of all accidents. Three out of seven (43%) of the landing accidents occurred while the pilot was attempting to land at an airport, while the other four (57%) occurred while attempting an off-field landings. Details of these accidents are given in the full report.

There were five (5) launch accidents in FY24, two (2) of them fatal, one (1) serious, one (1) minor, and one (1) with no injuries. There were two (2) cruise flight accidents in FY24. One of them was a mid-air collision between 2 thermalling gliders and the other a CFIT while thermalling over a ridge. Details on these accidents will be given in the full report.

There were seven (7) motor-glidiers involved in accidents during the FY24 reporting period. See the full report for more details.

While this significant increase in accidents is bad news, it remains to be seen if the number of hours flown or launches made also had a significant increase. Please respond to the SSF and/or FAA survey for 2024 to get us the data we need to understand this change.

The Soaring Safety Foundation also 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 setting your own personal minimums for weather, thermalling decision height, and other factors that impact your safety. Using the IMSAFE checklist and maintaining our flying proficiency, not just our flying currency are other factors that impact your personal safety. 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 club's BOD, Safety Officer or Owner. Having a Safety Culture that works means that every individual needs to participate. Let's strive for fewer accidents and zero fatalities in 2025!

The Soaring Safety Foundation continues to provide tools for your location to enhance safety. We offer a confidential 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>

