

Wash, Rinse, Repeat

By Tom Johnson

Have you ever really looked at a bottle of shampoo? I have no idea what polyquaternium-39 is, but it is in there. The list of ingredients is long and mysterious.

The directions tell me to wash, rinse, and repeat. Other than selling more shampoo because I am using twice as much, I do not really see a need. I think once is enough.

Like the ingredients in the shampoo, soaring safety has a long, and to some, mysterious laundry list of issues. You may not think about them, but like the shampoo, the threats are there and active whether we know it or not.

I, as an SSF Trustee, marinate in this safety stuff on an almost daily basis. I speak to pilots around the country about safety. Sometimes I talk with someone about a topic, and I think to myself that I just talked about this. With someone else, yes, but not this pilot. I wonder why this pilot has not thought about this. Then I remembered that we participate in this sport for recreation and enjoyment. Thinking about safety is hard. But like shampooing our hair, it is something we must do.

It is easy to forget about safety when we are actively doing soaring related tasks. While in theory we want everyone thinking about safety, in practical terms it is very difficult. It is easy to get caught up in getting the launch done. Or keeping the flight schedule on track. Or any other area with the focus on operation tempo.

That is where Sargeant Safety comes in play. Do you have someone at your operation who solely watches the scene in safety terms? Is this person active or passive? Can they and/or will they stop the operation if necessary?

While Sargeant Safety may be doing a great job, shouldn't we all be acting as Sargeant Safety? Why do we leave it up to the Sargeant to step in, when necessary, to call a halt even if numerous gliders are waiting either on the ground or in the air.

If you have ten sailplanes waiting for the launch and does someone have to notify Sargeant Safety a truck is parking 500 ft in front of the launch? Does Sargeant Safety stop the launch or do you keep going, and more importantly, why didn't the person who saw the problem stop the launch?

The astute reader will notice this requires everyone to be involved. Because of our human nature we must be reminded almost continuously to always use practices and techniques we know promote safety.

Our nature likes someone like Sargeant Safety hanging around. The Sargeant's presence relieves us of the responsibility

The leadership and CFG's at your operation must also ask why Sargeant Safety is a lone wolf. Why is the burden of safety vigilance falling on one person? Is getting everyone involved with Sargeant Safety an annoyance? Is safety something other members do while the real pilots go fly?

This is where we advocate having Sargeant Safety hang up the drill Instructor hat and put on a coaching whistle.

Coach Safety has two to three things to be effective.

Coach Safety has to be respected as someone who has soaring and aviation experience with a proven track record of good judgment. This pilot has to be trusted by the local community to act in the best interest of all involved. This trust has to be earned. It cannot be lip service or "do as I say, not as I do".

Secondly, Coach Safety shouldn't make you feel sick to your stomach. Coach Safety should make you feel prepared and confident. This approach should make you feel like your supervisor or safety person has your back. The leadership should make you feel like you're all looking out for each other. Pilots will care about their safety and each other when they know, first, how much we care about each other, and that you care enough to not take the lazy road of empty slogans and vapi safety rules. We, as a community, are better than that. that. Prove it.

The best coaches make time for their players every day. It's the most important thing they do. Teams don't get better unless the individual effort of each team member improves. The individuals get better when each team member, individually, gets time with the coach. Your job as a crew leader, supervisor, manager or safety person is to take each player aside each day and give them guidance and inspiration to want to be better. Don't waste your one-on-one time with your people enforcing rules. Explain the rule and coach their performance within the rule. Do you get that? It's not the rule you need to focus on but the performance and the technique they use within that rule.

Finally, every pilot deserves your attention, from the newest member to the most experience hot ship pilot. Investing time and effort in everyone is key. How are the members supposed to improve if Coach Safety doesn't spend time with them? Show people you truly care to help them be better and safer pilots and support personnel. Show them by your attitude and actions their opinion matters and has value. Be willing to realize they may have better ideas than you. Be open to doing someone differently if a better way is presented to you. Your true intent should be to help your people get better at safety.

Hopefully you will find that Coach Safety is a much better person to have around than Sargeant Safety. And that is the whole point. Coach Safety can teach us all to wash, rinse, and repeat safety. Even if you wear your hair high and tight, or have an operation that is squared away, Coach Safety will help you support these local safety activities. Coach Safety will help get you more accustomed to thinking about safety in a proactive way. And soon, you will begin to just think about these things as a matter of course.

I highly encourage you to go out and get safety dirty. Wash, rinse, repeat. Do that every time you come to the field. Coach Safety will be happy.

Now, does anyone know what polyquaternium-10 is?