



Safety Officer – A Job Description and Training Guide by Burt Compton

By invitation, the Soaring Safety Foundation has conducted more than 40 “Site Survey” observations of soaring sites around the USA. Most soaring clubs appoint a “Safety Officer” but we see many Safety Officers do not have the backbone or the backing of the club’s Board of Directors to be truly effective. Therefore, the SSF offers a “job description” and resource with the recently published “Safety Officer Training Guide”.

This comprehensive guide can be downloaded at www.soaringsafety.org

Clubs usually appoint a “Safety Officer” to manage the club training and safety aspects, often coordinating with a safety committee, and reporting to the club Board of Directors. Some commercial soaring schools may also designate one person to oversee operations, coordinate training, and update procedures as needed.

A Safety Officer works with the Flight Instructors, Towpilots, Ground Crews, Maintenance Officers and the Glider Pilots, including those who own private gliders, to make sure all comply with the club rules and procedures while cultivating a Safety Culture that may prevent accidents and reduce insurance claims.

This seems wonderful on paper but in reality we have observed that some Safety Officers are not given the authority of a club Board of Directors to implement better training or safety procedures, and are not always empowered to challenge unsafe procedures and pilots. Most of us have seen the glider pilot or towpilot that is the “Accident Waiting To Happen”, but some Safety Officers do not feel authorized to suggest retraining or grounding that pilot.

A Safety Committee can partially alleviate placing this responsibility on one person, so the committee, through the Safety Officer, may request a meeting with the errant “AWTH” pilot to discuss the issues. Some of these pilots are not scofflaws but are simply “out of touch”. We see some glider pilots, towpilots, line crews and even flight instructors “operating in a bubble”, in the sense that they only fly at one gliderport, using “we’ve always done it that way” procedures and training syllabi, so they are often unaware of current FAA minimum training requirements, pilot endorsements, contemporary training procedures as suggested by the Soaring Safety Foundation, or even the need for improving their safety culture.

The Well-Managed Club. Entities such as your insurance underwriters, the owner of the airport if not owned by the club, other airport users and the FAA fully expect a club to have a system in place to keep track of essential data. The club should know every pilot’s date of Flight Review, participation in “spring checkouts”, towpilot 12 month recurrency training and medical certificate due dates. Data regarding the club member

(and visiting pilot) FAA pilot certificate numbers, privileges, club aircraft checkouts, contact information, cellphone numbers should be kept current.

At some Site Surveys, club Board members confide they do not keep this information, or it is woefully out of date. "That's between the pilot and the FAA" doesn't cut it anymore.

A well managed club must know who is flying their equipment and if the pilots are current. An appendix to the SSF "Safety Officer Training Guide" offers a sample "Pilot Information Form" as a template.

A Soaring Safety Foundation Site Survey may be requested by inviting a Trustee or Advisor of the SSF to visit your soaring site. It is free and absolutely confidential. No specific information is written down by the SSF nor relayed to anyone outside the club.

The Site Survey will generate an immediate "tell it like it is" verbal report of your operations, which also includes observations of your compliance with good training and safety procedures. Show us your "good ideas"!

The SSF "Safety Officer Training Guide" includes specific guidance on how to develop a better safety culture, organize a training program, and provides a comprehensive index of FAA regulations that pertain to glider pilots and towpilots. The FAR Index was developed after the observation that many designated safety officers are not flight instructors, so this list makes it easier to locate specific rules. One often missed rule is that of the towpilots who are not also glider pilots, not having done three tows in the past 12 months (pause here like many who read this regulation), while accompanied by another current towpilot! This would be found in FAR 61.69, which is probably familiar to most CFIG's, but not necessarily to the non-glider rated towpilot.

Pilots flying your equipment who are not current, not properly endorsed or with expired Flight Reviews are obviously a liability to your soaring operation.

This article touches on just a few of the recurring issues seen during Site Surveys, so download the "Safety Officer's Training Guide" from the Soaring Safety Foundation website at www.soaringsafety.org for a comprehensive document that includes other observations and clearly defines the job of "Safety Officer."

