



Gotcha! Lesser-Known FAA Regulations for Glider Pilots and Towpilots
By Burt Compton

As a FAA Designated Examiner for Gliders, I am directed by the FAA Examiner Handbook to ask questions that explore the applicant's depth of knowledge. From my experience giving checkrides (and flight reviews), there are some FAA regulations that some glider pilots and towpilots have overlooked or forgotten.

I am a bit surprised that most pilots do not keep a current FAR/AIM book in their library. Some say "that's just for instructors". Well, you can get busted for not complying with an FAR even if you are not an instructor.

A Rule of Thumb: The FAA Part 61 regulations explain how to earn your pilot certificate and ratings. Part 91 explains how the FAA can take them away from you! This article notes some lesser-known FAR's or "CFR's" as currently defined by the FAA. Look them up and make sure you are obeying the rules whether giving rides, flying locally or making a cross country flight.

91.303 Aerobatic Flight. Not the parachute rule found in 91.307.

91.13 Careless and Reckless. A poorly defined "Gotcha!"

91.111 Formation Flight While Carrying Passengers For Hire. Not allowed.

91.103 Preflight Action. Do you really need a current aero chart?

91.103(b) Runway Length. Must know the length before every takeoff.

91.126 (b) Landing Patterns. Are gliders omitted from the left-hand rule?

91.209 Position Lights / Night Definition.

91.151 Towplane VFR Fuel Requirements.

61.69 Towpilot Initial Endorsement. Note that Glider training must be logged.

91.69 Towpilot 12 month Recurrency. All towpilots must comply.

91.121 Altimeter Setting. "Zero" or reported pressure altitude?

61.53(b) Medical Self-Certification. There is no “written statement.”

61.15 DUI Reporting A real “Gotcha!”

61.60 Change of Address. After 30 days of a change of your address you cannot act as PIC of an aircraft without informing the FAA in writing or on the internet at www.faa.gov For name changes, the procedure is listed in 61.25.

61.57 Currency for Carrying Passengers

91.409(2)(b) Inspections for Carrying Passengers / Instruction “For Hire”

91.9 Pilot Operating Handbook. Is it required in a Glider?

AIM 4-1-11 Use of Radio Frequencies 123.3 and 123.5.

Part 61 Training Requirements (logging ground training) for Private Glider (61.105 and 107), Commercial Glider (61.125 and 127), Flight Instructor Glider (61.185 and 187) certifications. The required logging of “ground training” is often overlooked by flight instructors. Endorsements by CFI’s should include references to the appropriate regulations. See the new SSA / SSF Glider Pilot Logbook for convenient pre-written endorsements in the back of the logbook. Order from the www.ssa.org merchandise department.

91.31 (d) Transition Pilot endorsement. Does it expire?

So, ask yourself: “How many of these regulations did I know? More importantly, how many more do you NOT know? Do you have access by textbook or website to the current FAA regulations?”

Why do you need to know all of these rules? Back in 1967 when I was preparing for my Private Pilot Written Knowledge Test, I complained to my airline Captain father about “so many regulations” (and there certainly were not as many then as now.) Dad’s reply: “Learn them, because most are written in blood.” Wow, that startled me, and if you look at many of the older rules, you can sense the truth in Dad’s statement. “Written in blood” is another good reason not to do something silly with your glider or towplane which may cause the FAA to write another regulation based on your poor judgment leading to “The new (*your name here*) Rule”.

There are several instances where some regulations do not apply to “gliders” simply by omission. These reg’s usually say “airplane” which refers only to that category of aircraft. Simply put, if the FAA says you can, you can. If the FAA says you cannot, then you cannot. If the FAA doesn’t say, then you can – well,

usually. Some FAA Advisory Circulars offer guidance as to interpretations. AC's are not reg's, but the FAA Inspectors may use them for their own judgments as to what they see as "careless and reckless". You should also research the higher standards often set in your personal or club aviation insurance policy. Those standards may exceed the FAA regulations regarding Pilot In Command time and "supervised solo", for instance.

Some pilots want to debate the "real meaning", look for loopholes and perhaps dance on the very edge of the regulations or minimum standards. Any debate should end with "what would an FAA Inspector or the NTSB hearing officers say", or "what will the insurance adjuster conclude?" Frankly, pilots who spend a lot of time searching for loopholes in the regulations and shortcuts in training time make me a bit uncomfortable.

For a quick index to many glider pilot / towpilot regulations and Aeronautical Information Manual (AIM) procedures, download a copy of the "Safety Officer Training Guide" at the Soaring Safety Foundation website www.soaringsafety.org

