



Soaring Site Observations: The Good the Bad and the Ugly. by Burt Compton, Soaring Safety Foundation Trustee

By the invitation of soaring clubs and commercial operators, the Soaring Safety Foundation (SSF) has conducted 107 free, friendly and confidential "Site Surveys" of soaring operations across the USA.

This article touches on just a few of the recurring issues we've observed.

Clubs usually appoint a "Safety Officer" or "Safety Committee" to monitor training and safety aspects, typically reporting to the club Board of Directors. A commercial soaring operation may designate staff to manage launch operations, coordinate training and upgrade "best practice" procedures perhaps after a "close call" incident. Soaring camps, SSA regional and national contests appoint a Safety Officer or Committee to host daily briefings and modify procedures as needed.

The Safety Officer Job Description. Consults with Towpilots, Ground Crews, Maintenance Officers, Flight Instructors and Glider Pilots, including those who fly private gliders, in order to monitor compliance with club rules and procedures while cultivating a Safety Culture that may reduce accidents and insurance losses.

Seems wonderful in concept but in reality, we have observed that some Safety Officers are not granted the authority from the club managers to upgrade training or safety procedures, so some are reluctant to challenge marginally safe procedures and pilots. Many of us have seen the glider pilot or towpilot that is an "Accident Waiting To Happen" but some Safety Officers do not feel authorized to intervene to suggest proficiency training, particularly for the so-called "experienced pilot." I've noticed that "experienced pilots" are having many of the incidents and accidents. (Note to myself: I fit that demographic with thousands of hours in my logbook!)

A Safety Officer or Committee may request a meeting with an errant pilot to discuss solutions. Perhaps these pilots are not scofflaws but are "out of touch". We've observed glider pilots, towpilots, line crew and even flight instructors "operating in a bubble" as they fly at only one or two airports, relying on "we've always done it that way" procedures and training syllabi. Some CFG's are unaware of current FAA / FAR minimum training regulations, pre-solo requirements, proper logbook endorsements and contemporary scenario-based training that promotes pilot "proficiency" as presented in the Soaring Safety Foundation Flight Instructor Refresher Courses. Every year the various SSF FIRC locations across the USA are listed at <http://www.soaringsafety.org/outreach/FIRC.html>

The SSF "Safety Officer Training Guide" anonymously includes recurring not-so-good observations along with possible solutions on how to cultivate a better safety culture. In the Guide an index of FAA regulations pertaining to glider pilots and towpilots is included. Some Safety Officers are not flight instructors so this FAR Index clarifies specific rules. For example, the rule regarding towpilots who have not



flown a glider in the past 24 months (by aerotow) or have not made three towplane flights in the past 24 months while accompanied by another current towpilot as stated in FAR 61.69, likely familiar to CFG's but not necessarily to towpilots.

The Well-Managed Club. Entities including insurance underwriters, owners of the airport and the FAA may expect a club to have a system to maintain pilot data. The club management should update every pilot's level of FAA pilot certificates, expiration date of Flight Reviews, renewal dates of CFG Certificates along with participation in "spring checkout" proficiency training. For the towpilots, their 24-month re-currency and medical certificate due dates. The club should update pilot privileges regarding club aircraft checkouts along with cellphone and emergency contacts for club members and visiting pilots.

Some club managers confide they do not keep this data, or it is woefully out of date. Saying "that's between the pilot and the FAA" doesn't cut it anymore. A well-managed club must know who is flying their aircraft and that all pilots are current by the bare minimums of the FAR's and better yet, are truly proficient to fly safely. The "Safety Officer Training Guide" includes a sample "Pilot Information Form."

Pilots who are not current nor proficient, not properly endorsed or with an expired Flight Review may jeopardize a club's insurability, future growth and airport access.

The "Safety Officer Training Guide" can be downloaded at the Soaring Safety Foundation (SSF) website at <http://soaringsafety.org/publications/Safety-Officer-Training-Guide.pdf>

Request a Site Survey. It is totally free and absolutely confidential. Nothing is written down by the SSF representative nor relayed to anyone outside of the club. Your Site Survey will generate a verbal debriefing which includes observations of your good ideas about training and safety procedures. Show us your "good ideas!" The SSF is very interested in how you have improved your safety culture. Your Site Survey may be scheduled by contacting program manager Burt Compton at burtcompton@aol.com