



## **SAFETY GRAM**

August 2020

Aviators often say 'fly safely,' and we all strive to operate within limits that ensure safe operation. But what if you find yourself in an emergency situation? Whether from our own making or a combination of decisions and circumstances, emergencies happen! No matter how we got into an emergency, how we handle it makes all the difference – potentially between life and death.

Every instructor teaches us to maintain aircraft control, analyze the situation, take the appropriate action, and land as soon as conditions permit in an emergency situation. One of the central problems when discussing emergencies is what constitutes an emergency is often not well defined. Sure engine failures, fires, midair collisions are cut and dry – but based on your experience and proficiency what else classifies as an emergency may vary. Only you will know when you're uncomfortable. If the aircraft has had a problem in flight, how serious does it have to be before you will call it an emergency? Techniques to focus on once you determine you are in an emergency situation are:

1. **Maintain aircraft control.** Don't ever stop flying the airplane! This sounds like a no brainer, but how many times have seen or heard of aviators forgetting this basic step at some point during the emergency? Don't get so distracted that you stop flying the airplane. If you have an operable auto pilot or another pilot on board, use their help! Fly the airplane! Never stop flying the airplane until you are parked.
2. **Analyze the situation.** Emergencies rarely require split second decision making. Take a deep breath, wind the clock, and figure out what's really going on. Taking action without thinking about the results can be more disastrous than not taking any action. In fact, misunderstanding what is going on can actually lead a PIC to make very poor choices in an emergency, compounding the emergency. Take the time to figure out what's really going on before you act. Refer to the checklist. And don't forget to fly the airplane!
3. **Take the appropriate action.** Can you fix the problem in flight? If not, sometimes the most appropriate action is simply to land the aircraft...but we'll get to that next. Can you get the engine restarted (and *should* you try)? Is there a system or circuit breaker you can reset, or pull? Can you manually operate the system? **Is there a checklist or procedure in the POH that might be applicable and have you followed it? Have you accomplished normal checklist items as well as the emergency ones?** Referencing a checklist is the best way to keep things under control in an emergency, and yet it often gets overlooked when adrenaline begins to flow. Don't forget your checklist and don't wing it! And don't forget to fly the airplane!
4. **Land as soon as conditions permit.** Take a look at accident investigations or aviation lawsuits, and you'll find a lot of examples of pilots who elected to overfly perfectly good landing

**Stacey Farland, Aero Club Program Manager, USAF Aero Clubs**  
**Stacey.farland@us.af.mil; DSN 969-7240, (210) 395-7240**

pavement when they had a bad situation. Many of us are inclined to try and get to a familiar field for repairs if there's trouble with the aircraft. The PIC is charged with maintaining safe aircraft operations and the safety of all passengers on board. By overflying a good airport in an emergency situation, the PIC will probably be second guessed if the outcome is anything other than an uneventful landing. No matter how inconvenient the short term problems of landing at an unplanned airfield, being alive to tell the tale is always worth it. Keeping a crippled aircraft airborne is rarely a good decision.

My last pitch, don't hesitate to declare an emergency with ATC. It's free. And they can really help. No matter how severe - relatively benign system malfunctions or genuinely crippled aircraft - terminate the flight based on "unairworthy mechanical, electrical, or structural conditions." ATC really doesn't care what the problem is; they offer whatever assistance they can. Rarely do they ask for additional FAA paperwork, either. ATC can effectively reduce workload by offering traffic priority, giving weather, landing info, etc. If you don't declare an emergency, you're not in distress and you won't get that kind of help!

**CONTINUE TO FLY SAFE!**

**Stacey Farland, Aero Club Program Manager, USAF Aero Clubs  
Stacey.farland@us.af.mil; DSN 969-7240, (210) 395-7240**