

SAFETY ON THE AIRFIELD

Aim: To learn how to ensure you are safe when at an airfield.

Airfields are usually wide open places and to the unfamiliar can pose a risk if potential hazards are not appreciated and allowed for. Some clubs share their field with other aviation activities like power flying, helicopter training, parachuting, model aircraft, microlights and scheduled airline services so they can be very busy places. There may be a variety of launch methods used so wires may be laid out over the seemingly open field. Gliders usually launch into wind like most other aircraft but when it comes to landing, they can approach from a variety of directions and land in places all over the airfield. They are quiet and can be difficult to see so all this adds up to making the airfield a place for all to have a high awareness of safety. The following are some general safety considerations for the airfield:

- Check where cars are permitted to drive on / around the field. Access is usually around the perimeter of the field and some sort of focal point like an ops caravan will indicate a base of gliding operations to head for.
- Avoid damaging the airfield surface when driving; particularly in winter when the ground can be soft.
- Drive in a predictable manner and at a reasonable speed...respect any airfield speed limits.
- If driving out on to the field, put your hazard lights on and check the way is clear of launching or approaching aircraft.
- Stop if an aircraft is on approach so they can manoeuvre around you if necessary.
- Park cars in designated areas clear of aircraft manoeuvring / parking areas.
- Keep a good lookout when venturing out onto the airfield operating area as landing gliders will not be heard and can approach from any direction. Remember, the glider cannot put on power to *overshoot* to avoid you.
- Towplanes trail ropes with small steel rings on the end that are potentially lethal so keep well clear of their approach path.
- Cross landing areas only when necessary and avoid loitering in such areas.
- Never cross the takeoff path of an aircraft even if it doesn't look ready for launch. The safe path is around behind the aircraft.
- Avoid getting close to or crossing a launch wire or the area where they may be. Treat all cables as "live" as they can be operated without warning even without a glider attached.
- Do not handle launch cables / ropes or their attachment rings unnecessarily.
- Never walk or stand in front of a glider which has a launch cable / rope attached.
- Remain well clear of the winch when it is operating as cables or parts of cables and launch apparatus can land all round the vicinity. (The winch driver has a protective cage for their safety)
- Do not approach an aircraft with a propeller turning unless the pilot is aware of your intentions and has signaled so. Learn the safe way to approach the pilot; usually from behind the wing or along the leading edge so as to be clear of the prop.
- Towcars used for launching travel fast and the driver's attention will be focused on the glider they are launching so remain well clear of their path.
- If a smoker; check if smoking is permitted on the field. Smoking is not permitted near aircraft and gliders or refueling operations and it does present a fire hazard if the airfield's grass is dry.
- Ensure any children with you are aware of where they can safely play on the airfield.
- Check if pets are permitted on the airfield. Dogs must be kept on a leash.

Most of the points are common sense and come naturally once you are familiar with gliding operations. Be alert for others who are not so familiar and alert them to any hazards before they endanger themselves or others. Be polite and they will appreciate your actions. Stay alert and be prepared to ask if you are unsure about any aspect of the operation.

It doesn't hurt to ask.... It can hurt if you don't.

Need To Know:

- The rules and considerations for driving on an airfield.
- Personal safety considerations when we are out on the airfield.

Further Reading:

- Club Rules; These will have any safety rules specific to the club's operations.
- Chapter 2, The Glider Pilot's Manual; by Ken Stewart. Good all round info on Gliding Sites.