

GUIDANCE FOR PERSONS CONDUCTING FOLLOW-UP FLIGHT SAFETY INVESTIGATION ON BEHALF OF THE BRITISH GLIDING ASSOCIATION SAFETY COMMITTEE

If you have been forwarded a copy of this document you have been asked by the Safety Committee or one of the other executive bodies of the BGA to look into an aspect of flying safety which could potentially cause future incidents or accidents.

Whoever briefs you on the scope and focus of the investigation should guide you as to the limits of what you should cover. However, if in the course of the investigation you find other matters worthy of attention you should discuss them with whoever briefed you. By adhering to this process investigations are controlled and the risk of friction with the host club is minimised.

I have been involved in many such investigations over the years and have always been well received by the host club. However it is vital from the outset to reassure the club officials that the investigation is purely to identify flight safety lessons for the benefit of the wider gliding community and not in any way to look for blame or apportion it. Every club that I have visited and all of the people I have interviewed in pursuit of a flight safety investigation have been open and honest and have always been totally approachable. This can only be achieved if you are equally open and honest with them and include them in as much of the process as you can. This often leads to the task taking an extended amount of time, but it pays big benefits in the long run.

An integral part of the investigation is to gather information from witnesses. This is best done on a one to one basis away from noise and distraction. Invariably the best opening gambit is to ask the witness to describe whatever they saw in their own words. Avoid interference even when they go off topic as it is vital that they tell their story in their way in its entirety for you to gain an overview of events. Once this phase is complete you will need to get more specific information regarding some of the individual aspects of the event. Here you will need to be very careful with your question technique. Never ask direct or leading questions. Indirect or open questions will let them pass information and impressions without bias.

Preventing a similar accident elsewhere usually requires an understanding of why it happened. The reasons may include elusive human factors, and may reflect not only training and supervision, but how that training was interpreted, expectations, and the safety culture in the club. This is where you may need to probe deeply but delicately.

The investigation may require interpretation of logger data. There may be technical issues relating to rigging or airworthiness. Assistance on such topics is readily available from BGA experts. The person who asked you to conduct the investigation will be able to identify that expert help if needed.

If at any stage you feel that you are dealing with matters that are outside your field of expertise or you are uncomfortable dealing with, you should tactically withdraw and give the problem back to the person who sent you.

Once you have gathered all of the information you require you will be able to write a report and draw conclusions. You are free to make formal safety recommendations, but they should be used sparingly. In many cases the BGA Safety Committee in conjunction with the Senior Regional Examiner may wish to be guided by the report as a whole in determining necessary actions to enhance safety at particular clubs or at all clubs.

It is vital that all reports are scrutinised by whoever asked you to perform the investigation to ensure that it fully addresses the issues at hand. Additionally, I am always happy to read and comment on any piece of work if the author so wishes.

All of these flight safety investigations are of great importance to the association because they enhance flight safety. Thank you on behalf of the BGA for spending your time on this task.

C V J Heames
BGA Principal Accident Investigator

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