F - SUPERVISING FLYING

INTRODUCTION

This chapter covers aspects of airfield supervision including the organisation of First Flights for members of the public. Other supervisory tasks, such as looking after solo but unqualified pilots and managing type conversions, are covered elsewhere in this manual. There is some overlap between the guidance here and that given in *Managing Flying Risk – Supervision* on the BGA website.

Naturally, many of the practical aspects of airfield supervision will be site specific and clubs will have their own procedures. Here we give an overview of the various considerations that need to be borne in mind.

FUNCTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

In setting up our airfield supervision for the day, we are aiming to provide a safe, efficient and enjoyable operation. There are many practical tasks involved:

- Checking weather and NOTAMs
- Deciding where to put the launch-point and setting it up
- Deciding which gliders are needed, getting them out of the hangar, DI-ed and towed into position
- Keeping the logs, signalling, wing running, retrieving – all the jobs that make the launch-point run smoothly
- Briefing and debriefing pilots in training, those not yet qualified, those attempting early cross countries, type conversion, or similar new ventures
- Making sure everyone is aware of the day's arrangements, perhaps through a morning briefing for all pilots
- Looking after any visitors, such as pilots from other gliding clubs or members of the public coming for First Flights
- Ensuring everyone is accounted for at the end of the day.

A well-supervised operation covers some softer skills too:

- If a flying list is being used, ensuring it is fair
- Looking out for newer and less experienced members
- Encouraging early solo pilots in particular to get the most out the day – helping them set a goal for their flight and discussing it afterwards
- Being vigilant for any incidents that could disrupt the operation and ideally catching them before that happens.

This is a great deal of work and it needs to be shared by a team. If unqualified pilots are flying there must always be a FI(S) supervising, but ideally that person should not be trying to directly manage **all** the jobs mentioned above on their own.

One approach might be for the club to identify experienced and competent individuals and train them for launch point supervision, so that they can manage the people doing the practical tasks, whilst keeping that overall eye on the operation which is so vital. These 'ground supervisors' would be acting under the delegated authority of the duty instructor and helping to free that valuable resource for concentrating on instruction and pilot briefing.

AIRFIELD SETUP

Every airfield has its own peculiarities that will affect how the gliding operation is set up for the day. If your club has only one runway, or uses only one launch method, the setup decisions will probably be simpler than at, say, a circular field that can support many launch directions, and where a mixture of launch methods is used. Nevertheless, there are common factors applying everywhere.

The first step will be to check weather and NOTAMs because either of these may preclude flying at all. The weather may be flyable now, but is forecast to deteriorate. This should to be briefed to the team, to avoid the scenario of continuing flying as conditions gradually worsen to the point where it becomes unsafe. The aim should be to create an atmosphere where any member of the team can raise concerns.

Assuming flying is possible, these are some of the considerations for how to set up the field:

- Where should the launch-point be for today's wind direction?
- What is the state of the field? Are there areas that have to be avoided, e.g. for landing or towing over? If so, has everyone been briefed?
- If launching by more than one method, do we have adequate separation, e.g. Aerotow to winch cables?
- Is there room for manoeuvring gliders and vehicles as required at the launch-point?
- If winching, where should the winch be positioned to ensure the cable can fall safely? Are there particular dangers today, such as cables drifting over power lines, buildings, trees and so on, following a break?
- Will low sun become a problem for launching or landing as the day goes on?
- If aerotowing, does the tow out route take account of local noise abatement issues?

It makes sense for decisions on these points to be made in consultation with those chiefly involved, such as the tug pilot and winch driver.

MANAGING THE LAUNCH-POINT

The launch-point is typically the hub of the flying operation. Ideally, on busy days there should be one person who is not performing any of the individual jobs but is keeping an overall eye on things. An efficient launch-point means more flying, which means more income for the club and happier pilots. It also means a safer operation, with things happening according to plan and anomalies being easy to spot.

There may be a complete mixture of experience at the launch-point, and the club will have some method (perhaps a 'ground handling' training card) for training new members in the jobs that need to be done. Some of these jobs – such as running the wing – are safety critical and the person in charge needs to ensure that members are trained before they attempt them. The jobs include:

- log keeping
- cable attaching
- wing running
- signalling
- cable towing for winching
- retrieval of landed gliders

Whilst everyone should be paying attention and be encouraged to speak up if they see a potential problem, it will be a big help if there is a supervisor, who is able to stand back and watch – to see that the signaller really is checking that it's 'all clear above and behind', that the pilot has not left the tail dolly on, that the brakes really are closed and locked, that there isn't a stray visitor about to wander across the launch line, and so on. This person may also have time to keep an eye on who should be flying next with which instructor, notice whether someone is doing more than their share and needs a break, and make sure that the new member is not missing their turn through being too diffident.

As well as the practicalities of launching gliders, there may be a lot of other interactions going on in the vicinity of the launch-point:

- Instructors briefing and debriefing trainees
- People chatting or giving their attention to their phones
- Pilots going back and forth for cushions, weights and suchlike
- People wanting to check the logs, or check their place in the queue
- Padio messages to and from winch drivers and tug pilots, and to and from airborne gliders.

There should be some way of keeping the actual launching free from distraction, involving just those people needed, who are all focused on the job in hand.

AIRCRAFT AND VEHICLES

Most clubs have rules about where private vehicles can drive on and around the airfield. These may be dependent on the state of the field e.g. a grass field that's too soft to drive on. Anyone driving on the airfield, whether in a private car or a club vehicle, needs to be aware of all aircraft approach paths and landing areas and keep a good lookout.

There may be preferred tow out routes for gliders. When gliders are towed behind a car the lookout may be less effective than when there is a crew walking with a towed glider. There may be preferred routes for retrieval of landed gliders, so that blockage of potential landing areas or further launches is minimised.

All these considerations should be briefed to members and visitors and documented in the club's site manual. Visiting members of the public need to be individually briefed and, if possible, escorted or driven around the airfield by club members.

Training for club pilots needs to cover ground handling of gliders and club vehicles, including:

- hangar packing and unpacking, and who is allowed to do this or supervise
- storage of batteries and parachutes
- defect reporting
- how to DI gliders, and who is allowed to do this
- how to DI club vehicles, who can fuel them, drive them etc if there are restrictions
- how to tow behind a vehicle as the driver, as the wing holder and as the person by the nose
- how to park a glider if leaving it unattended on the airfield
- where to push and pull when manoeuvring gliders on the ground by hand
- how to handle canopies to avoid expensive damage.

FIRST FLIGHTS

Club members will be aware of the risks involved in the sport of gliding, and hopefully how to mitigate them. This does not apply to members of the public coming for First Flights, who will expect the experience to be completely safe, and should be correct in that assumption.

There is extensive guidance elsewhere on how IFPs and instructors should manage these flights and the PIC's training should have prepared them for all aspects of their role. The key point for the pilot flying a member of the public is that the flight should be well within their limits. One way of putting it is that the member of the public should find it exciting but the PIC should not.

If the PIC has a rating lower than an FI(S), then a higher rated instructor must supervise the flying operation. If the supervising instructor is also in charge of club flying on the day, there needs to be a mechanism to ensure sufficient oversight. Considerations include:

- Are visitors escorted while airside? This includes friends and family of the person who is actually going to fly.

- Have the visitors been briefed adequately? Have weight limits been checked if there is any doubt? (The limits should be made clear at the point of booking the flight, but there needs to be provision for checking on the day.)
- Is the weather suitable? Club flying may sometimes continue in conditions that are unsuitable for First Flights.
- Is the PIC suitably qualified and current on the launch method and aircraft to be used?
- If the PIC is an FI(S) are you, as overall supervisor, sure they understand the criteria for First Flights? Sometimes it is the experienced instructors who try, inappropriately, to give 'extra value,' or continue in inappropriate weather in ways IFPs and BIs would not dream of.
- If possible, does the PIC have helpers – to meet and greet, talk to the non-flying friends and family, provide escort to and from the launch-point, help with getting in and out of the glider?

Members should be made aware when flights for the public are going to happen alongside normal club flying. Then they will be primed to be friendly and welcoming to visitors, and it helps with understanding if there are any delays or slow launch rate. Many clubs prefer to keep this kind of flying to specific times rather than mix it with club flying, so that full attention can be given to the visitors and club activities are not disrupted.

END OF THE FLYING DAY

At the end of the flying day the airfield supervisor needs to oversee all the tasks involved in dismantling the airfield for the day:

- Towing away, whilst maintaining lookout discipline as gliders may still be landing.
- Cleaning of aircraft and vehicles as required by club policy.
- Hangar packing, storage of parachutes and batteries.
- Dealing with the logs.
- Checking all gliders are accounted for.

On winter days when there are just a few club gliders flying this is straightforward. On summer nights when some gliders will be away cross country, returning long after club flying has stopped, it is a different matter. There is no requirement for the club to monitor the activities of qualified pilots but, particularly if we are talking about challenging terrain, nobody wants their friends to be left on a remote mountainside, possibly injured and hoping someone will notice they're missing.

Your club should have a policy on what is expected of the airfield supervisor. Given the prevalence of electronic conspicuity, it may be reasonable to expect the duty supervisor to look online for any gliders not landed back when they finish for the day. Many clubs have reporting procedures they require their cross-country pilots to follow (e.g. after a land out), to avoid the unfortunate duty supervisor being left wondering whether or not to call the emergency services for search and rescue. However, qualified pilots must look after their own safety and there is no question of the airfield supervisor being responsible for them.

All pilots should be aware that when they land safely it is vitally important to make sure their landing was logged.

ACCIDENTS AND INCIDENTS

If a serious accident occurs there are defined procedures that need to be followed; these are documented on the BGA website under the *Safety* section.

The club should have an emergency action plan ready to be followed by the airfield supervisor or any other individual taking charge. They must be familiar with the plan. The immediate actions are likely to be:

1. Stop launching.
2. Call the emergency services if required.

After that, there is time to think and follow the steps of your plan.

A serious accident in this context is an occurrence associated with a flight resulting in fatal or serious injury to a person, or substantial damage to an aircraft.

Incidents which are less serious but which have safety implications beyond the club must also be reported to the BGA. Most clubs have systems for recording **all** incidents with safety implications, even if they are considered (typically by the Safety Officer or the CFI) too minor to be worth a BGA report. Such incident recording is useful in determining measures to prevent recurrence.

The debriefing of pilots who have had an 'incident' of some kind is covered elsewhere in this manual but it is worth stressing the basic point that when someone has made a mistake two things are needed:

1. They must realise they made a mistake.
2. They must understand how to avoid it in future.

The duty supervisor dealing with the incident should bear in mind that sometimes a cooling off period is needed before step 1 can be achieved.

HUMAN FACTORS

If you have read this far, you will realise that a great deal is encompassed in 'airfield supervision.' On a busy airfield with lots of pilots and gliders, this collection of tasks should be shared and not left entirely to one over-worked individual. An important aspect of Threat and Error Management is to recognise the threat of any member of the team being overloaded and avoid the error of making them carry on when they need a break.

Being out of doors on an airfield for many hours may result in dehydration or heat exhaustion at some times of year and extreme cold at others, not to mention hunger and low blood sugar. Look out for yourself in these respects and also try to keep an eye on other members of the team.

