

CALLBACK

From NASA's Aviation Safety Reporting System



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The non-towered airport environment can introduce some curious threats that are not usually prevalent in towered airport operations. A non-towered airport environment exists at an airport without a tower or at an airport with a tower that is closed while the airport remains open. In either case, similar threats can exist but may be especially subtle in the latter, particularly if a pilot is unaccustomed to using non-towered airport procedures.

In the non-towered environment, pilots rely on rules, regulations, radios, communications, and common sense to ensure safety. Deviating from these precepts invites near misses, ground conflicts, opposite direction traffic, and unannounced aircraft movements, all of which have been reported to ASRS. Peculiar threats to aircraft on the ground have been reported, and easy or unrestricted access to active runways and taxiways has led to incidents as well.

This month, *CALLBACK* shares reports of incidents that occurred during non-towered airport operations. Significant threats and hazards are revealed, while lessons learned suggest increased awareness and strict compliance with regulations and procedures.

A Tale of Two Takeoffs

After taking all the usual precautions at a non-towered airport, this private pilot began the takeoff roll. The reporter perceived an unexpected object ahead, which was quickly identified and became a significant threat.

■ *[It was a] beautiful, crisp, sunny day, and the wind was light. I monitored CTAF during startup and ground flight checks, but I did not hear any traffic. The hangars and ramp area are at the Runway 32 [approach] end, and there is no taxiway parallel to the runway, so with the light crosswind, I setup to depart on Runway 32. While holding at Runway 32, I transmitted on the radio my intention to take off on Runway 32 and depart the pattern to the southwest. When about 300 feet down the runway on takeoff roll, I noticed a large white object at the far end of the runway that looked unusual, but I could not discern its shape.... The runway is...3,500 feet [in length] plus approximately 300 feet of displaced threshold. Since the departure end terminates adjacent a busy road, my first thought was that a large semi-trailer had parked on the side of the road. As I was about to rotate approximately 700 feet down the runway, I saw the aircraft rolling toward*

me on Runway 14. [The plane] was still on the ground, so I elected to continue the rotation, climbed, and banked to the right. The other aircraft broke ground very nearly the same time as I had, climbed, and banked to his right. We passed about 100 feet laterally! At that point, I made several calls on the radio, but there was no reply. The other aircraft appeared to be some kind of low wing aircraft. Either the other aircraft was NORDO (unlikely), or using the wrong frequency (unlikely since there is only one frequency at that field), or simply did not use the radio.... If I had been flying a more conventional airplane, I would have had a longer ground roll, and both airplanes would have been on the runway at rotation speeds – a head on collision on the narrow runway pavement!

If the other aircraft had been burning its landing light when I taxied into takeoff position, I would have seen that and clearly identified the object as an airplane and subsequently taxied off the runway.... “Burn the light” just made my departure checklist.... If the other aircraft had been required to use the radio, then this near miss would likely have been avoided. It is ironic that my antique aircraft has a radio, yet the much newer aircraft pilot felt that radio traffic wasn't important.... I think it's time for the FAA to require radio use at all uncontrolled public use airports, no exceptions.

Flyer Beware at Non-Towered Airports

This private pilot was well established in the traffic pattern. The reporter was perplexed when procedures employed by a departing business jet resulted in a dangerous situation.

■ *METAR and ATIS were reporting winds calm.... In accordance with the SFRA (Special Flight Rules Area) flight plan that I filed, I was conducting left closed pattern work, departing and landing on Runway 17. As part of my startup check, I confirmed by radio check that I was operating on... CTAF, and during my pattern work, I heard and communicated with other departing aircraft.... Multiple aircraft departed Runway 17 immediately before and after I began my pattern work.*

I was in my fourth approach for landing, having reported on CTAF that I was on left downwind and then left base for Runway 17, when a business jet announced departure from Runway 35. I immediately announced that I was turning final for Runway 17. At the beginning of my left turn to

final at approximately 800 feet MSL, I saw the business jet accelerating on Runway 35 and lift off the ground.

I took immediate evasive action by turning further left and inside the departing business jet, judging that a right hand turn would put me closer to the departing aircraft and blind to his location. After the business jet passed, I crossed the runway at 800 feet and announced entering left upwind for Runway 17. I attempted a single communication with the departing business jet pilot but did not call his tail number, and I do not know if he heard any CTAF calls during his departure. Hearing no other aircraft in the pattern at that point, I climbed to pattern altitude and completed...three additional landings.

I do not know whether the business jet pilot failed to sufficiently monitor the ATIS and CTAF frequency to understand that Runway 17 was the active runway, or whether he judged that he could make the more convenient northern departure before I began my final approach. In either event, he created a dangerous near miss.

Unexpected Runway Clutter

This general aviation pilot began a normal takeoff from a non-towered airport. When the passenger identified a hazard that the pilot had not perceived, safety had already been compromised, and all involved incurred significant risk.

■ I was ready for takeoff on Runway 22 and looked to make sure the landing traffic had cleared the runway. When it was exiting, I called, "Aircraft X taking off 22, straight out." After I started my takeoff roll, my passenger said, "People on runway," and I noticed them about midfield crossing from north (right) to south (left), about half way across [the runway]. I realized that I was too fast to abort my takeoff and that continuing my takeoff was safer. I moved to the right side of the runway, and then after liftoff, I went further to the right. The people still were on the left side of the runway, almost off it, when I passed by them. I estimate that I went diagonally over them about 300 or 400 feet.

How to have prevented [this] incident? Pause again before takeoff to make sure the runway is clear. Post signs and... have people monitoring pedestrians on the airport to make sure they don't get near or cross the runway. It was open house that day and good weather.... Some pilots had to park airplanes on the south side [of the runway].... There were three or four of us waiting in line for takeoff, and the people crossing the runway should have seen that.... They should... have waited for everyone to takeoff or asked for a golf cart to take them around the airport to their airplane.

A Perfect Aviation Storm

With their IFR clearance, a light turbojet crew opted to fly a published obstacle departure procedure from a non-towered airport. Uncommunicated intentions, perceptions, and expectations resulted in an undesirable situation.

From the Captain's Report:

■ We were departing [from]...an uncontrolled airport. The copilot received the clearance, "[via FIX] as filed, maintain 7,000." We decided to do the obstacle departure [procedure], as we thought that was what ATC expected. We departed Runway 30. On climbout prior to contacting departure, we flew through a large group of parachutists at about 6,500 feet. After contacting Departure, they gave us an immediate turn. Departure asked if we saw the parachutists, and we replied that we did. Departure asked us why we didn't go directly to [FIX], and we replied that we were on the obstacle departure.... ATC knew of parachute activity in the area. [We] knew we were planning the obstacle departure [procedure], but that was not communicated to ATC.

From the First Officer's Report:

■ ...I advised [the Captain] that there is a published obstacle departure procedure (ODP) for Runway 30. Due to higher temperatures, elevation, and rising terrain I felt it would be safer to follow the ODP.... During this time I was on the phone with...TRACON since I could not reach them on the radio.... The ATC controller very quickly read off, "Cleared via [FIX] then as filed, climb and maintain 7,000,"... I advised the PIC of our clearance, and we went over the ODP. We departed Runway 30 and made a last call on...CTAF. I contacted...Departure...and checked in. Once we reached about 6,000 feet, I noticed and called out skydivers at 11 o'clock high. The PIC leveled the aircraft at 6,500 feet.... We had already checked in with...Departure, but were not advised of any skydiving activities. After leveling off, ATC advised us to turn right to a heading of 120.... Once we were clear of all skydivers we continued our turn to a heading of 120. We advised ATC of the skydivers, and ATC advised us that, due to skydivers, we had been issued [FIX] as our first fix. We were never given any notice or caution prior to this.... In addition, we reviewed all NOTAMs, and there was nothing mentioned other than occasional skydiving in the area northwest of the field.... Nothing was mentioned by [TRACON] when I called for our clearance, and [I] even advised him that we would be departing Runway 30.... Lastly, there was no communication on...CTAF about jumpers.

ASRS Alerts Issued in August 2018	
Subject of Alert	No. of Alerts
Aircraft or Aircraft Equipment	4
Airport Facility or Procedure	6
ATC Equipment or Procedure	9
TOTAL	19

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August 2018 Report Intake	
Air Carrier/Air Taxi Pilots	5,783
General Aviation Pilots	1,473
Flight Attendants	587
Controllers	556
Military/Other	350
Mechanics	333
Dispatchers	188
TOTAL	9,270