

CALLBACK

From NASA's Aviation Safety Reporting System



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NON-TOWERED



AIRPORT OPERATIONS

At an airport without an operational control tower, sometimes referred to as an “uncontrolled” airport, communication is one of the key elements in maintaining proper aircraft separation. Use of the Common Traffic Advisory Frequency (CTAF) helps to assure the safe, orderly flow of arrival and departure traffic.

FAR 91.113 cites basic right-of-way rules and FAR 91.126 establishes traffic-flow rules at non-towered airports. The Aeronautical Information Manual (AIM) and FAA Advisory Circular 90-66A expand on these regulations to define procedures for operations at non-towered airports.

Staying visually alert is the final measure of defense against aircraft that may be operating without a radio or without regard to the standard non-towered airport procedures.

The following ASRS reports highlight some of the problems commonly associated with non-towered airport operations.

UNEXPECTED OPPOSITION – TWO OPPOSITE RUNWAY TAKEOFF INCIDENTS

A C680 Flight Crew had to abort their takeoff when an aircraft made an unannounced departure on the opposite runway. It is not known if the “other airplane” failed to use a radio or did not have one. For aircraft without a radio installed, the use of a hand-held transceiver is highly recommended at busy non-towered airports.

■ *After boarding passengers and starting engines, we notified [Departure Control] that we were ready for [IFR] departure on Runway 17. We were informed that there would be a delay if we used 17, so we decided to depart on Runway 35 to avoid the delay since winds were calm. There was one aircraft that departed Runway 17 as we were taxiing to Runway 35, but we did not hear or see any other traffic. We were released by Departure from Runway 35 at which point we visually cleared the area left and right and transmitted on CTAF that we were departing [Runway] 35. We did hear another aircraft arriving from the north about six miles away, but did not see it. After takeoff we were to make a sharp left turn and knew the traffic would not be a factor.*

As soon as we took Runway 35 and advanced the power for takeoff, the Co-Pilot called, “Airspeed alive” and then said he saw an airplane far down the runway. I yelled, “Abort” below 50 knots. We watched the other airplane lift off

and sidestep slightly to the right as we exited the runway. [It]...passed abeam us by about 400 feet. We never heard anything else on the radio.

In another example of “unexpected opposition,” the pilot of an Experimental aircraft encountered opposite direction traffic that failed to announce a departure against the flow of traffic.

■ *Calm winds prevailed on arrival.... I landed and refueled. The calm wind runway at [this airport] is Runway 15. I prepared to take off and announced I was holding for 15. Inbound traffic started to announce entering the 45 for Runway 15 and one aircraft announced turning base on Runway 15. I broadcast my departure on 15 and rolled. Another aircraft came into view rolling on Runway 33. I sidestepped to the west of the runway approximately 50 feet. When the other aircraft saw me he then sidestepped to the east. I announced that two aircraft were departing in opposite directions from Runway 15 and 33 to alert other traffic. Other traffic acknowledged. The departing low wing aircraft then announced that he was crosswind, Runway 33 and I announced I was crosswind on Runway 15. We went our separate ways.*

I estimate we passed each other by about 250 feet. The other aircraft was not using his radio and was not following local procedure to use [the] calm wind Runway 15.

OVER THE TOP

An alert C182 pilot was wise to keep an eye on another pilot who was not communicating and apparently not paying attention to other traffic.

■ *I was taxiing for takeoff.... At the entrance to Runway 18, I saw that the windsock showed light wind from the north. I saw an aircraft in the run-up area of Runway 36. I announced on CTAF that I would back taxi on Runway 18 to the intersection of Runway 18 and the taxiway and would then exit the runway. While back taxiing, the aircraft in the run-up area of Runway 36 taxied onto Runway 36 with no radio call. I announced on CTAF again that I was now back taxiing on Runway 18 with no response from the other aircraft. The aircraft on Runway 36 then commenced takeoff with no radio call. I moved to the right as far as possible and stopped at the edge of the runway. The other plane rotated over my aircraft.*

SAY WHAT?

Using the CTAF to announce one's intentions and to listen for other aircraft is the best means of preventing traffic conflicts. This M20 pilot had a frustrating encounter with another pilot who chose not to use the radio... for a rather dubious reason.

■ *On crosswind for Runway 9, I saw another aircraft departing Runway 23. I had heard no radio traffic, so I called on CTAF to see if he had his radio on; no response. I then flew downwind, base and final but could not see the other aircraft and there was no radio traffic on the CTAF. Just as I was about to touch down, the other aircraft crossed the intersection of Runways 5-23 and 9-27 about 1,000 feet in front of me as he landed on Runway 23. We were both landing simultaneously on intersecting runways.*

After shutting down, I walked to the other pilot's hangar and asked him several questions:

"Do you have a radio in your plane?"

"Yes."

"Do you keep it turned on?"

"No"

"Why not? We just about collided out there."

"I can't hear it because of my hearing aid."

"Why don't you get a headset?"

"I have one. It doesn't help."

"Did you realize that we were both landing and almost hit?"

"Oh, were you landing?"

INTERSECTION NEAR MISS

Bear in mind that while you follow all of the recommended procedures for non-towered airport operations, other pilots may not. This C172 pilot learned that keeping a good lookout is a major part of the "defensive flying" required at these airports, especially when there are intersecting runways.

■ *The winds were from 310 degrees and slightly favored Runway 27. However, Runway 27 required a back taxi full length from the GA ramp and there is a taxiway available to Runway 36. I elected to depart on Runway 36 due to the taxi options. I was monitoring the CTAF frequency all the way from the GA ramp to Runway 36. I announced on the CTAF frequency that I was departing Runway 36. I heard*

no announcements from other aircraft while taxiing, during engine run-up, or on takeoff.

On takeoff, my wife, who is a pilot, called out another aircraft on Runway 27. Then I saw the aircraft and at the same time someone called out the possible collision on CTAF. I decided I had enough airspeed to rotate. I lifted off and banked slightly to the left to miss the aircraft rolling through the runway intersection. We missed, but it wasn't by much.

Because the C172 is a high wing aircraft, my view of Runway 27 was restricted after lining up on Runway 36. It is my guess that the other aircraft landed long on Runway 27 to reduce his time to get to the ramp. I have no idea how he approached Runway 27.

"WE MISSED BY MAYBE 30 FEET"

In another intersection near miss, an M20 pilot used the correct communication procedures, but failed to react to the visual alert from a cockpit passenger.

■ *I took off from Runway 19, which was favored by the wind direction. Runway 19 has a displaced threshold due to trees on the approach. I did a run-up on the pavement between the ramp and the runway. I transmitted on CTAF (which I had used to speak to another pilot on the way in, so I knew it was the correct frequency) that I was entering Runway 19. Shortly after, I announced that I was departing from 19 and began the takeoff roll. I did not notice the aircraft on the run-up area next to Runway 27. I had accelerated to about 60 knots when I saw the other aircraft turn onto Runway 27 and begin either a taxi or takeoff roll, crossing directly into my path. I took evasive action. I don't believe he did. We came very close to colliding (his propeller with my left wing). We missed by maybe 30 feet.*

I did not see the other aircraft until it was almost too late. I don't know why I didn't notice it. My 16-year-old son started pointing, but I thought he was pointing to a deer or debris or something. Perhaps I was fixated on the runway surface.

The taxiway leading to Runway 27 turns south into the run-up pad for 27, so a pilot doing a run-up in preparation for takeoff on 27 is facing south and cannot see the start of Runway 19 behind him. (But when he/she turns onto 27, Runway 9 is clearly visible.)

The pilot of the other aircraft was not on CTAF and did not hear my radio calls and failed to check before crossing an active runway.

ASRS Alerts Issued in August 2014	
Subject of Alert	No. of Alerts
Aircraft or Aircraft Equipment	2
Airport Facility or Procedure	2
Other	1
TOTAL	5

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A Monthly Safety
Newsletter from
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August 2014 Report Intake	
Air Carrier/Air Taxi Pilots	4,562
General Aviation Pilots	1,196
Controllers	666
Flight Attendants	534
Mechanics	219
Military/Other	120
Dispatchers	96
TOTAL	7,393