CALLBACK

From NASA's Aviation Safety Reporting System

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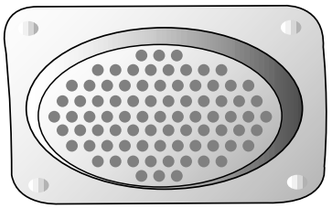
Safe Communications in Airport Surface Operations

ASRS is currently conducting a "structured callback" (telephone survey) study for the FAA on runway incursion incidents that occur at uncontrolled airports, or airports at which the Tower is closed during nighttime and early morning hours. A recent controller's report to ASRS offers insight into why some runway incursion incidents and ground conflicts occur when the Tower is not operating.



■ *Before the Tower opens, aircraft taxi about the airport, crossing runways, with no announcements on the CTAF. Also numerous corporate jets land and depart without making any announcements on the CTAF. I imagine they must be [thinking], "I don't hear anyone so no one must be around but me, so why bother announcing."*

It is mostly corporate jets and turboprops that are failing to use the CTAF, and as traffic continues to increase, an incident is in the making.

Maybe it is time to remind all pilots…that using the CTAF is in their best interest, as it can prevent accidents from happening. And the CTAF is not just for landing or take-off, but should also be used when taxiing around on the airport, especially when crossing a runway.

The Common Traffic Advisory Frequency (CTAF) is a frequency designed to carry out airport advisory practices while operating to or from uncontrolled airports. The CTAF may be a UNICOM, Multicom, FSS, or Tower frequency. It is clearly identified in VFR Terminal Area and sectional charts, the Airport/Facility Directory, Jeppesen Low Altitude Enroute charts, and other aeronautical publications used by general aviation and air transport pilots.

If a pilot operating at an uncontrolled field sees the movement of other aircraft, but doesn't hear anything on frequency, this may indicate that the pilot has tuned an incorrect CTAF frequency.

Runway Incursion, Pedestrian Version

The FAA and many pilot organizations have given much attention in recent months to prevention of runway incursions involving aircraft. However, these events may also involve pedestrians, as a general aviation pilot discovered after parking his aircraft at a new FBO.

■ *I had flown into [airport] with a CFII for my instrument cross-country requirement, and the aircraft was secured with…a new FBO. Weather the following day prevented my departure, so we stayed over another day… My brother-in-law drove me to the airport but we were unable to locate the road to get to the new FBO location. Time was getting late to make my take-off…and my brother-in-law was going to be late for work. We never did find the road that led to the FBO.*

We noticed what appeared to be a ramp path from some hangers just south of the Tower area, where I could see the FBO across what appeared to be all ramp. Some new construction was also seen, a new taxiway to the new FBO area with cones blocking any vehicle movement on the taxiway. I elected to take what seemed to be a safe path across a construction zone. I did not see any runways when I exited my brother-in-law's car…

As I approached the construction area, I noticed the Runway 10 threshold and realized the runway was there, but still thought it was part of the construction area as the runway's surface condition was quite rough. To be safe, I looked for traffic and walked around the threshold end of Runway 10 in the mud. After I had passed, I noticed a Cessna 172 and a King Air enter the run-up area, then they took Runway 10 for takeoff a few minutes later. At that time I realized this runway was still active.

I continued to walk to the FBO across the newly constructed ramp area south of Runway 10 when the airport authority representative in a truck stopped me… He informed me that what I had done was a runway incursion and, after quick reflection, I agreed with him…

The airport authority suggested I contact the FBO by phone, as it is part of their services to me as a pilot to help me get around the airport in just such instances. While the runway incursion event with an airplane was clear to me through reading AOPA Air Safety Foundation literature, I did not comprehend at the time the same event could be triggered by a pedestrian. I now fully understand this and will avoid it under all circumstances in the future.

In 1999, the most recent complete year for which the FAA has collected runway incursion data, Vehicle-Pedestrian deviations accounted for 19% of all runway incursion events. Pilots who find themselves in our reporter's situation should resist walking or driving across the airport surface. Help is usually just a phone call (or radio call) away.

ASRS Recently Issued Alerts On…
Recurring flap control unit fault on a EMB-120
Cessna 560X emergency pressure valve failure
LAHSO operation incident at a major Northeast airport
An airport group on a runway during an air carrier landing
Jet Stream 3200 uncommanded inflight engine spooldown

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October 2000 Report Intake	
Air Carrier / Air Taxi Pilots	2376
General Aviation Pilots	701
Controllers	108
Cabin/Mechanics/Military/Other	202
TOTAL	**3387**

Snow Bird Sagas

"The weather outside is frightful," begins a popular holiday song. A general aviation pilot who experienced frightful winter weather tells an unusual story of how his aircraft became a grounded "snow bird":

■ *I was flying…at 7000 feet on an IFR flight plan. The weather at destination was MVFR and forecast to deteriorate. I was concerned that I might finish my flight with an insufficient fuel reserve. I therefore resolved to make a precautionary landing at [airport XYZ] to rest, refuel, and get a detailed update to my weather briefing. I selected XYZ because it was the nearest airport with an IFR approach, and…the next sizable airport on my route was too far away and had worse weather than XYZ.*

On receiving my request, Center immediately cleared me for a VFR approach to XYZ. I was unable to locate the airport and requested and received vectors to the ILS approach to Runway 06. The approach was bumpy, but I could see the approach lights from 4000 feet. I could not make out the runway lights, and assumed they must be dim and the pilot-controlled lighting inoperative. I was unable to increase their brightness using pilot-controlled lighting but the pilot-controlled lighting, of course, did affect the approach lights. I could see the plowed runway clearly in contrast to the snow-covered airfield, and the landing on Runway 06 was straightforward.

I then discovered that, although the runway had been plowed, the turnoff to the taxiway had not, and I had no way to exit the runway. I was unable to contact Center by radio from the airfield and decided to walk to the FBO and contact Flight Service from there by telephone. Before calling, I hoped to have resolved the problem of moving my airplane from the runway. I discovered the FBO was unattended and locked. Furthermore, the public telephone outside it was frozen and not working. I then returned to my airplane, contacted FSS by radio and informed them of my position. The State Police were called, a snowplow summoned, and I was able to resume my flight the following morning…

I realize that my flight planning was inadequate. If I had…[identified] XYZ as a possible alternative landing site, Flight Service would have told me it was closed by NOTAM and I could have found a suitable alternative… While I now fully appreciate it is not their responsibility to do so, it was unexpected that ATC would clear me twice to the approach of a closed airfield.

Our reporter correctly outlines his own responsibility to properly plan and execute his flight. He apparently didn't realize that a Center controller may not be aware of a local airport's operational status unless it affects the Center's operations.

Berm Steer

Darkness and blowing snow obscured taxiway markings and reduced forward visibility as a B-737 left the gate. The flight crew attempted to follow the proper taxi route to the runway by taxiing parallel to a snow berm left by plows that had cleared the ramp earlier. The Captain describes what happened next:

■ *At night, with a snow-covered ramp, we left the gate area and paralleled the ramp… Based on the airfield diagram, we believed there was a taxiway in front of us. There was a berm of snow from snowplow operations to our left. Parked DC-10 aircraft (in storage) were to our right. The snow plowed area abruptly got narrower. I attempted to correct to the left to correct [toward] the berm, however we had left the ramp surface. What we believed was a taxiway, turned out to be a service road. [Airport] operations personnel advised that "numerous" other crews have made the same mistake, but because the ramp was not snow covered, they were able to see their error and make a U-Turn back to the taxiway.*

Contributing causes: 1) snow-covered ramp, darkness; 2) taxiways and service roads look the same on the airfield diagram; 3) there were no taxiway lights at the edge of the ramp; 4) crew was accomplishing a checklist and was not devoting 100 percent attention to taxiing.

The Captain added that the aircraft was finally freed by a company recovery team that used two snowplows and large cables around the main gear struts. He acknowledged that the crew should have stopped the aircraft when they could not see the taxi lines and requested a guide vehicle.

'Tis the Season

Holiday safety rules for the passenger cabin:

- ✔ Don't decorate the cabin without the Skipper's approval
- ✔ Make sure decorations are fire-proof
- ✔ Check the passenger list (better check it twice).

■ *During boarding, Flight Attendants installed one string of Christmas lights and attached with paperclips to [an] overhead vent. The lights were plugged into an aft lavatory electrical outlet. The flight took off [and] climbed to cruise with lights in place. At cruise a FAA inspector identified himself to the Flight Attendant and wanted to know "what the Captain thought of the lights." The Flight Attendant asked if she should take them down, but the inspector asked that they stay up. The Flight Attendant informed the Captain about the situation. The Captain told the Flight Attendant to take the lights down and she did so. The FAA inspector deplaned at destination without conferring with either [of the] flight crew members.*