

A BLUNT MESSAGE

Two of the most experienced pilots at the CAA are increasingly worried by what they're seeing, and hearing about, in the circuit.

In the last two years there've been 141 reported circuit occurrences. In 91 of those instances, the pilots needed to take avoiding action to prevent a catastrophe.

While 39 of the occurrences involved student pilots on solo flights, far more – 54 – involved aircraft with an instructor aboard.

CAA aviation safety advisor Carlton Campbell presented the statistics to the recent national conference of Flying NZ, telling the assembled aero club instructors and CFIs that, "This is something we can and need to positively influence and improve".

At 74 reported occurrences, however, the group of pilots most involved in circuit conflict were locals.

Carlton says this highlights the complacency of some pilots at their 'home' aerodromes.

"Sometimes good airmanship diminishes, the more familiar a pilot becomes with their environment.

They relax and stray from radio telephony standards, and their situational awareness is not as vigilant as it might be in an unfamiliar environment.

"As with all increasingly lax safety behaviour, it seems fine – until the day it isn't."

CAA flight examiner Marc Brogan, who's often moving around the country visiting training organisations, is also increasingly worried by what he's seeing in and around circuits.

"While locals and complacency may be at one end of the occurrence spectrum, itinerants and a lack of preparation, are at the other.

"Non-local pilots – not all of them, but of sufficient number to be of concern – are using non-standard procedures to try to join a circuit. They might also be flying in the wrong direction in the circuit, or opposing the circuit that is – or should be – in use.



Photo courtesy of Jess Jennings.

// If everyone approached the circuit courteously and flew predictably in the circuit, many of the early mentioned statistics would not have occurred. //

“There is, at times, no adherence or even an acknowledgement of the right-of-way rules,” says Marc.

“There are even instances of these pilots berating the pilot who was doing the right thing.

“This is unacceptable and should be reported – for everyone’s benefit.”

Safe circuit flying

Here’s a rundown of what Carlton and Marc believe is needed for everyone to be safe in the circuit.

- Observe the right-of-way rule (91.229).
- Apply the principles of rule 91.223 *Operating on and in the vicinity of an aerodrome*.
- Maintain good airmanship – including making clear, correct, consistent, concise and timely radio calls, using standard RTF.

Also –

- **Maintain good situational awareness**

“The three most critical behaviours in VFR flying are look out, look out, and look out,” says Carlton.

“No matter how close to home you are, no matter how relaxed you think you can now become, no matter how many perfect radio calls you’ve made, nothing replaces looking out the window and actually seeing the threats.”

“Move around, don’t just shift your head as you look out,” says Marc.

“Consider the cockpit layout, obstructions in the design and the physical forces on you.

“Move your entire torso and add some greater areas of view to your scan.”

And –

- **Apply a ‘yield, don’t push’ philosophy**

“Many of the occurrences reported to the CAA were in part a result of a pilot pushing into the conflict

zone as opposed to stating early, ‘I’ll be number 2,’” says Carlton.

“It’s not too dissimilar to a roundabout or ‘merging like a zip’ as you enter a motorway – use good decision-making and proper awareness to take your appropriate slot.

“If everyone approached the circuit courteously and flew predictably in the circuit, many of the earlier mentioned statistics would not have occurred.”

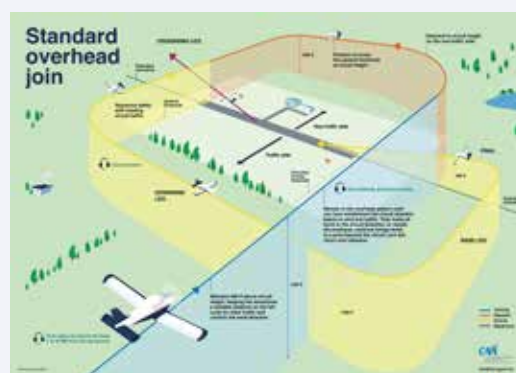
The ‘blunt message’ bit

Marc says if pilots don’t get the message about consciously improving their flying in circuits, it’ll be only a matter of time before there’s a tragedy.

“Don’t sit in your machine and think, ‘they’ll have me in sight’. Because ‘they’ may be thinking the same thing!

“There may not be a second chance.” ☹

// NEW STANDARD OVERHEAD JOIN POSTER



This poster has been updated and improved. To get free copies for your training organisation or for yourself, email publications@caa.govt.nz; or contact one of the CAA’s aviation safety advisors, whose names and numbers are on page 25.