



TELL SOMEONE WHO CARES!

In Ireland a considerable number of us in the general aviation community who fly for fun and enjoyment, do so in class G airspace and in fact may rarely if ever enter controlled airspace, thus not requiring a flight plan. A considerable majority fly from private licensed airfields or private farm strip-type airfields where there is no legal requirement to file a flight plan, or in fact, to tell anyone of our intentions.

Consider a scenario:

It's a lovely evening for flying and you decide to go for a flight in the local area.

You don't have a pre-determined plan as to where you might go other than take-off and fly around, perhaps practice a few circuits at your airfield or visit another local airfield or airstrip.

You arrive at the airfield to find nobody else is lucky enough to have the time to go and enjoy the sky.

You diligently pre-flight your aircraft and satisfy yourself that all is well and safe to go flying.

You start-up and complete your pre-take-off checks, all looks good so nothing to stop you enjoying your flight.

You line up, take-off and climb away, when suddenly at 300' your worst nightmare occurs; engine failure shortly after take-off! You have been trained as to what to do in such a scenario, lower the nose, adopt the correct airspeed etc but one vitally important part of the jigsaw is missing, a suitable area to land! Lack of a large enough field, perhaps high trees, hedges or other obstacles in the way. At such a low height, time is very short so you have to make the best of what's thrown at you.

You hit an obstacle such as a tree or the hedge and come to a sudden stop! You have survived the impact but are injured and unable to get out of the wreckage. You live in hope that there won't be a fire. No one has seen you crash, the nature of a lot of our small airfields and airstrips being that they are in 'out of the way' locations and away from civilisation.

You may have told your significant other that you intended going flying and would be late home so he/she is not expecting to hear from you for perhaps several hours.

The radio is useless because of your location and the fact that in any case the radio at the airfield is un-manned.

You are lying there, trapped in the wreckage, with broken bones and perhaps bleeding and beginning to suffer from shock. No one knows your there and you will not be missed for several hours, when it may very well be too late.

The Golden Hour

In emergency medicine, the golden hour is a time period lasting approximately one hour where following traumatic injury or medical emergency, during which there is the highest likelihood that prompt medical treatment will prevent death. It is well established that the chances of survival are greatest if care is received within a short period of time after a severe injury.

How to reduce the risk

Always carry your mobile phone with you when going flying. Make sure it's fully charged. Consider putting it in an easily accessible pocket person.

If you are lucky enough to have a free hand which is not injured you will stand a great chance of reaching the emergency services by dialling 999 or 112 - even if the phone signal is very poor in the area you have crashed. Consider setting the number on speed dial on your phone for easy access. The emergency services will need to know your location.

If you have a GPS app on your phone and can access it, it may be helpful for you to help pinpoint your position. Practice using such GPS apps so as to be able to make full use of it when you most need it!

In the event that you do not have your phone with you or cannot access it due to your injuries, then you need another plan..

So what else can you do? Tell someone who cares!

An immediate family member or significant other may not always be the best option. They may not have any great involvement or interest in flying other than the fact that they know you engage in it as a pastime. They are not always best placed to understand the risks involved. It could be considered that discussion regarding the subject may cause unnecessary stress on relationships.....

As pilots, we understand (or ought to understand) the risks involved when we fly. Flying is no different to many other adventure activities in which people engage.

Consider developing a 'Buddy' system with another pilot you may know. Other pilots will readily understand and should be readily willing to participate - particularly in view of the fact that you can do the same for them.

This system can be as simple as a telephone text message.

- Text your 'Buddy' the details of your intentions (a simplified flight plan)
- Aircraft registration
- Where you are flying from (runway you intend to use)
- Where you're going (destination airfield, or local flight indicating general area in relation to the airfield e.g. north of/south of etc)
- Endurance
- Number of Souls on board: **very important as the emergency services will need to know how many people to look for! Bear in mind that when you carry a passenger/passengers your level of responsibility as pilot in command is increased. You are no longer only responsible for your own safety but also that of your passengers.**
- Time you intend to depart (estimated time of take-off)
- Estimated time of return or arrival at your destination and the time at which you will text or contact him/her to let them know all is well.

It would be important to get an acknowledgement from your 'Buddy' prior to taking off in case he/she has not seen the message, or their phone is switched off etc.

Your 'Buddy's responsibility is very simple

If he/she has not heard from you by the appointed time, they should telephone you. If they cannot make contact with you, and your intended flight was to another airfield, contact the destination airfield to check if you arrived. Even if the intended flight was to start and finish at the same airfield, check with any other potential airfields in the general area you intended to fly.

If you have not arrived or it is clear that you are not contactable your 'Buddy' should contact the emergency services and report the situation and liaise with them.

Where can this system fail?

The responsibility to make this system work is firmly on you as the pilot and your pilot 'Buddy'.

If you as the pilot, fail to make contact with your 'Buddy' within the appointed time by simply forgetting to call he will unnecessarily waste the time and resources of the emergency services. (Similar to neglecting to close a flight plan though better safe than sorry)

You may have decided during the flight to extend the flight duration simply because you are enjoying yourself and weather, fuel and daylight allow or perhaps that you have had to make a diversion. While using a mobile phone while flying is not the norm, a simple text message with a revised estimate or any change of plan regarding destination etc should suffice. Sending of a quick text message for reasons such as updating your information to the person who is essentially 'watching out' for you should create no more of a distraction for the pilot than say making quick calculations on a chart for a diversion or reassessing ones position.

Most private flights such as discussed in this example tend to be less than one hour duration. Should an accident involving serious injury happen, the 'buddy system' should ensure that at the very least ones chances of being reached by the emergency services within the 'Golden hour' are greatly improved, as opposed to not being missed for several hours when it may be all too late.

There are many 'find my phone' type apps available for free on the internet which can be used to help locate your position - provided you have your phone with you. The vast majority can be accessed and located from another mobile phone. So provided your 'Buddy' has the necessary details he/she can keep an eye on your progress almost in real time. It would be well worth the time spent on downloading and checking out some of these apps to assess one which may suit your needs. Simple ones such as 'find my iphone', 'find my friends' or 'one touch' are but a few which may be useful. If you use such an app, ensure it is enabled and your 'Buddy' has the details so as to access your position. The down-side with such apps is that they require a phone signal strong enough to receive internet data. However, every little helps!

Should you be unfortunate enough to suffer an engine failure or other emergency causing the need to make an unplanned landing during your flight even the perfectly executed forced landing plan can end up going wrong! You may have been in contact with the nearest information service (e.g. Shannon information) during the flight but when you may most need to contact them for assistance, time and altitude (for radio coverage) may be in short supply. At best you may only be able to give ATC a general indication of your position and intended landing area.

Should the worst happen and you find yourself injured or trapped, the time it takes be located may be increased considerably, thus eating into your Golden hour.

- **So set up your buddy system today.**
- **Use it every time you fly, even if your flight is being made within controlled airspace.**
- **Be sure your phone is fully charged and any 'find me' type app you may choose to use is enabled.**
- **Food for thought.....It may well save your life some day.**