

USING THE **IMSAFE** CHECKLIST TO INTEGRATE FLYING INTO YOUR ROUTINE

A well-known aviation pundit recently stated that pilots spend too much time worrying over whether conditions will be acceptable for a flight they're planning. His advice, "Don't worry and wring your hands days ahead of time. Don't even think about it but if conditions aren't acceptable at the time of your flight simply don't go!" For the pure recreational pilot whose primary goal is the occasional weekend flight for a hundred dollar hamburger this is excellent advice. However, the professional pilot needs to have a systematic method to ensure he or she is fit for flight. The pilot also needs a procedure to look ahead and determine the optimum time for undertaking a flight. This also applies to pilots in aviation degree programs who are aspiring to be professional pilots.

So, what template can provide us with a systematic method? A good starting point is the **IMSAFE** part of the OU Risk Management Checklist. If you've been here longer than a semester you should know all about this checklist and where to find it on the aviation website. If you're just starting out, ask your instructor where to find this checklist on the website. This form should not only be applied a few hours before a flight but well in advance of a flight. How far in advance? Read on!

ILLNESS: If you wake up the day of your flight and you're sick, there's not a whole lot that can be done. The flight is either cancelled or the company finds another pilot.

MEDICATION: If your doctor wishes to prescribe a medication to you, your first reaction should be "let me get back to you on that." Most "non-AME" doctors have no idea how a medication will impact your flight status. Before accepting a prescription it's up to YOU to do some basic research on the short and long term impacts to your flying. Pay particular attention to the long term impacts. Sometimes taking a medication even once will ground you until you go through a whole battery of tests to prove to the FAA that the underlying condition is resolved and you no longer need that medication. If the medication is going to be an issue, discuss alternatives with your doctor. There may be a different drug that effectively treats the condition and is approved by the FAA. However, if in the final analysis, the only course of action is taking a medication that grounds you for an extended time, your health obviously takes a back seat to flying.

STRESS:

A lot of stress associated with flying boils down to the weather and its impact on the flight. The purpose of the flight could be getting a passenger to an important meeting or trying to get in that last cross country flight so you can complete the course before the end of the semester. In many cases you can coordinate with your passenger to make the flight within a window of time. For example, if there is a desired day of Wednesday but can go on Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday. In this case start checking the weather a week or more in advance. If it's not looking good on the desired day, it may be flyable the day before or the day after. In some cases the window may only be 12 hours. This may be sufficient to make the flight – if you check the weather well in advance so you can give your passenger a heads up to show several hours early. Set up a time to coordinate with the passenger for a go/no-go call if the weather looks bad through the entire window. This time needs to be far enough in advance to allow the passenger to make alternate arrangements in the event of a no-go decision. The importance of the mission dictates how conservative you are in making the go/no-go decision. If the mission is vital to you or your passenger any doubt at all about the weather or any other factor will lead to a no-go decision.

How does this apply to your training? Yes, you have a set schedule but there is also the opportunity for write-ins. Through agencies like the Weather Channel you can get a general feel for the weather ten days in advance. Sure you would LIKE to fly that long cross country on Saturday. On Wednesday you look at the weather and see that Saturday is doubtful but Sunday looks good. Rats, you've got a big test on Monday. Well, ask your instructor to set you up to fly on Sunday and plan on studying on Saturday. Beyond this there's the old adage: **Make hay while the sun shines!** At the beginning of the semester it's easy to think that you've got all the time in the world to get your flying done – especially if you're enrolled in Secondary flying. Better to make arrangements to fly more while the weather is good. Then if there's a long stretch of bad weather further into the semester you won't be behind. To reiterate – procrastination is a big stressor. Getting and staying ahead of the flight schedule relieves stress!

ALCOHOL: No problem! The rule says eight hours, bottle to throttle. You've got a 0800 time slot so you won't be cranking the engine until 0830. You can drink until 0030! The alarm goes off at 0700 and it's a great day for flying! Assuming you wake up at all you feel like crap. Oh well, call your instructor and say you're not feeling well and hope you don't get the third degree on why. Another flight slot lost and you're getting behind. There are numerous studies that indicate that even after a few drinks you are impaired to some degree for at least 24 hours. So, don't drink within 24 hours of show time for a flight. It may not be any fun to stay sober while your friends are living it up. However, if you don't think flying is the ultimate high then you may be training for the wrong profession.

FATIGUE: Many organizations have rules to ensure a pilot doesn't fly while fatigued. At OU for example we don't allow solo flight after midnight. You may have heard that the FAA will be implementing new fatigue rules for passenger carrying airlines which require more sleep before a flight. Additionally, crew members will have to certify that they are not fatigued when they report for duty. Some pilots have complained that the rule doesn't go far enough in that if a pilot reports they are fatigued the airline can punish them for not being fit for duty. Really? The pilot bears no responsibility to report for duty well rested? Maybe the airline should dispatch personnel to tuck the pilot into bed! There may be an underlying situation (stressing about the weather for example) that prevents adequate sleep. However, it is up to each of us to plan our day and week to ensure we are well rested. If you have a 0800 flight, plan your schedule so you don't have to pull an all-nighter studying for a test later in the day. You have a full class schedule, followed by a 1900 cross country flight that evening. Definitely get a good night's sleep and plan on a power nap during the day.

EATING: Should you eat a heavy meal just before going on a five-hour cross country flight? That's great for kicking back in a recliner and falling asleep watching a football game. Not so great for staying awake on the cross country flight – especially if it's a night cross country after a full day of classes. Again, you need to plan this aspect of your schedule. Eat close enough to the flight that your body is fueled but not so close that you are digesting a lot of food just before and during the flight.

So there you are – a **CHECKLIST** which provides all of us a systematic procedure to ensure we are fit to fly. For those of us who fly frequently we apply this checklist not just before a flight but throughout the days, weeks and months of our lives!