The Soaring Society of America, Inc. P. O. Box 2100 Hobbs, NM 88241-2100 575-392-1177 575-392-8154 (fax)





Founded in 1932 Division of the National Aeronautic Association U.S. Representative of the F.A.I. for Soaring

Mike J. Hodges, Air Safety Investigator NTSB 4760 Oakland St. Suite 500 Denver, CO 8023-2793

Mike,

The Soaring Safety Foundation (SSF) is a separate operational entity within the Soaring Society of America and is chartered to promote safety in soaring through pilot education, program development, information dissemination and participation in areas of general aviation safety pertinent to soaring. The SSF stands ready to assist the NTSB in resolving questions related to glider safety and offers its specific expertise as related to glider accident investigations.

Our response to your inquiry is below.

1. I have seen in the helicopter community and in the balloon community, there are industry standards for commercial operators, in which they can achieve a safety certification. These industry standards are above and beyond the various federal regulations.

Does the SSA/SSF have a similar safety certification program in place for commercial glider operators, where operators can go through an evaluation and receive a safety certification?

The SSA/SSF believes that the FARs incorporate what we consider to be reasonable safety standards. The SSA/SSF does not have the authority to regulate pilot licensing (FAA responsibility) nor does it have the authority to regulate or enforce actions or findings on commercial glider operators. Therefore there is no mandatory safety certification program provided by the SSA/SSF to commercial glider operators. However, the SSA does provide an organized forum for Commercial Operators and Business Members (COBM) to meet to discuss safety and operational issues on a regular basis. The SSA provides meeting space and logistical support for meetings during the SSA convention.

In addition, the SSF provides safety related events in an on-request manner to both commercial and club glider operations. These events include a Site Survey whereby an on-site day long evaluation of the commercial or non-commercial operator is conducted by one or more knowledgeable individuals who have been trained to conduct these surveys. This evaluation looks at both ground and flight operations and helps the operator create a detailed set of action plans to address any deficiencies that were noted. The SSF also annually conducts several in-person safety seminars nationwide, which provide training and education on current safety practices and address any specific operating issues that may be raised during the seminar. Safety related resources are also available online at the SSF website (www.soaringsafety.org) and the SSA website (www.ssa.org)

Finally, the SSF is a FAA authorized FIRC provider. As such we offer a glider focused 2-day training class for instructors and non-instructors in the best current practice in flight safety and flight training. These courses are held 6-8 times a year at various locations around the country.

2. For glider and occupant equipment, does the SSA/SSF advocate (or require in certain cases) the usage of certain equipment such as:

a. 406 MHz ELTs (i.e. to help locate wreckage/accident survivors in a timely fashion).

ELT's are not required by FAA regulation. However, glider pilots are encouraged to let others know before a flight or by radio while in the air, their approximate location when they fly away from the home airport. Some gliders are voluntarily equipped with ELTs. Somepilots also carry SPOT or Inreach GPS based locator devices to provide flight following data to fellow glider pilots, family, and friends. The SSA website includes a "live sailplane tracker" link which displays the real-time location of any registered glider that is carrying one of these devices. Registration is free.

b. Transponders (i.e. to help prevent midair collisions).

Gliders are exempt from 14 CFR 61.215 (transponders) and 61.225 (ADS-B) equipment requirements. However, glider pilots are encouraged to equip their aircraft with Transponders and/or ADS-B equipment if they operate in high density traffic areas. The majority of gliders that operate in these areas are Transponder equipped.

c. Parachutes for occupants (i.e. to provide an escape route in the event the glider enters an unrecoverable flight sequence).

Parachute usage is defined by 14 CFR 91.307. Typically for gliders, when aerobatic maneuvers are being conducted. In addition, most single place gliders allow use of a parachute and most glider pilots wear them when flying.

d. Supplemental oxygen system for occupants (i.e. to prevent hypoxia above certain altitudes that are not covered by federal regulations, for example Australia and India require supplemental oxygen at all times for gliders above 10,000 feet).

14 CFR 91.211 defines when supplemental oxygen is required and who needs to use it. The SSA/SSF encourages pilots to receive altitude chamber experience if they anticipate using supplemental oxygen or operating above 10,000 ft and develop an understanding of their personal needs and limitations regarding supplemental oxygen usage.

If you have any additional questions please feel free to contact either the SSA office or myself.

Regards,

Richard Carlson, Chairman Soaring Safety Foundation