



VIRGINIA FLIGHT SCHOOL SAFETY ARTICLES – NO 01/08/07

EMERGENCIES

DEFINITION

An emergency can be described as any unforeseen event or situation that demands immediate action to achieve a safe result. .

EXPECTATIONS

It is generally understood and accepted that when an emergency is declared all options open up to the pilot and all options are supposed to open up for you and everyone is supposed to do everything possible to make your circumstances easier. However, reality and pilot responsibility run deeper than that.

TYPES OF EMERGENCIES

- Life threatening; and
- Precautionary.

Life threatening emergencies are fairly clear cut – if you don't act positively and immediately there could be a loss of life. A typical example is a large bird strike where the bird penetrates the windshield and strikes the pilot's face. The immediate consequences of this event could in themselves be catastrophic and even more so if all possible actions are not taken to control the situation.

Precautionary emergencies are less clear cut. The bird strike may only have cracked the windshield which in itself is not life threatening but a very real possibility exists that the windshield could shatter which could result in a life threatening situation. An abnormal situation such as excessively high engine oil temperature might arise and you as the pilot would require deviation from an assigned clearance to land before a possible engine failure occurs.

WHEN DO YOU DECLARE AN EMERGENCY?

Once again life threatening situations are clear cut and there would be no hesitation in declaring an emergency. Pilots are largely independent minded persons with an ego. The declaration of an emergency in a non life threatening situation might therefore be regarded as a "weakness" and inability to handle the situation – ego dented. This situation would be exasperated if there was an error on the part of the pilot such as failing to ensure there is sufficient fuel for the planned flight and then running low on fuel.

There is an old saying : “Rather be the key witness for the defense at your hearing than the guest of honour at your funeral”. What this simply translates to is take the safe approach and declare the emergency and sort the circumstances, if any, out later. Declare and get additional help, that might not turn out to be required, than not declare and find yourself in a rapidly developing desperate situation where you wished you had declared and got that extra help.

WHO DO YOU DECLARE THE EMERGENCY TO?

As the pilot, you firstly declare the emergency to yourself. This might seem ludicrous but declaring the emergency to yourself by actually saying “I have an emergency situation” subconsciously sharpens your senses and focuses you to the problem at hand. Once you have done that declare the emergency on the last frequency that you had contact on with a controller. If you are still in contact with a controller so much the better. If you are out of controlled airspace declare the emergency on the designated frequency that you are on for the flight region that you are in

ACTIONS

There are three actions to take when faced with an emergency and they should be taken in the following order :

- Aviate.
- Navigate.
- Communicate

Aviate. First and foremost fly the aircraft. Keep it under control as far as possible at all times. Then check for any systems faults that may be causing the emergency.

Navigate. Maintain situational awareness – know what is going on around you and how you fit into the current picture. Next confirm your geographical location and lastly decide where best to fly the plane to to get it on the ground as expeditiously and safely as possible.

Communicate. As mentioned in paragraph 8, establish radio contact with someone preferably ATC. Explain your predicament and request help. Offload as many tasks as you can. Take advantage of any assistance offered.

WHAT RIGHTS DO YOU HAVE?

During an emergency you basically have the right to take any action to ensure the safety of the aircraft and persons on board – a favourable, safe outcome. However, bear in mind that you still have to fit into the system and not take any actions that could endanger the lives or property of third parties.

POST EMERGENCY ACTIONS

Document and report in factual, non emotional terms exactly what happened and what actions you took during the emergency. This information could be vital in instituting preventative measures to minimize a recurrence of the event. Examine the course of events closely in an attempt to arrive at a source reason for the emergency and propose possible solutions to prevent a recurrence.

CONCLUSION

Don't be reluctant to declare an emergency

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