

Maintaining currency

All airtime is hard-won. Study of BHPA incident reports reveal that currency – the amount of recent airtime recorded in the detailed logbooks that most of us keep – is a major factor affecting the likelihood of a pilot experiencing a flying incident.

Pilots flying above 50 hours a year are less likely to experience an emergency, and more likely to be able to handle it successfully, than pilots logging far fewer hours. A pilot logging an hour or two every few months, and perhaps not having flown for a while, is exposing themselves to far greater risk in the air. But even experienced pilots can have time off, be deployed away, suffer from illness, etc.

Adding new sites, new gliders, or harsher conditions to the mix, even when you are current, increases the risk. But considering your currency doesn't mean changing your life to get 100 hours a year. It's about acknowledging when you aren't as current as you might like to be, and flying accordingly. The table below, compiled by the BHPA tech staff, gives a rough outline of what high and low currency looks like, and the levels of risk entailed.

Currency index				
Total airtime	Flying for how long?	Time since last flew?	Any new factors?	Risk
100 hours	2 years	1 week	None	Low
15 hours	3.5 years	7 months	New site	High
4 hours	6 months	2 months	New site	Very high
> 250 hours	> 10 years	3 years	New wing	High

When to deploy

The recent history of paragliding reveals numerous cases worldwide where pilots have been killed, or seriously injured, after impacting the ground while still trying to recover control of their paragliders. Or when taking no remedial action at all, perhaps paralysed by panic. In both scenarios, investigation has concluded that rapid deployments of their emergency parachutes would almost certainly have saved them.

The decision whether or not to deploy will depend on the height that will be lost during your attempts at recovery and your initial proximity to the ground. But any efforts to regain control of the paraglider must be secondary to the key concern of monitoring your height. Recovering a collapsed wing is very satisfying if you have plenty of height to play with; however, descent rates can be extremely fast when a canopy is spinning out of control. If you are low, your first reaction must be to deploy your parachute. Don't leave deployment to the last second. If in doubt, throw it out! If you are low, throw!

No parachute?

More than one case has been reported recently of a new, fresh-out-of-school CP pilot appearing on their local club sites without an emergency parachute. A new pilot may not realise just how exposed they are without one. At this time of year in particular, sites can be crowded to a degree that makes a mid-air collision more likely. And a new pilot, despite perhaps flying a benign wing, is unlikely to have the skills required for rapid recovery from any kind of deflation, whether the result of turbulence, poor handling or a collision. In short, a new pilot is even more exposed than a more experienced one.

Emergency parachutes are expensive, for sure. Nevertheless to fly without one is regarded by all as a prospect fraught with great risk. If you are tempted to buy one second hand, check the build date; most manufacturers 'life' a parachute at ten years. And make sure it is the correct size. A descent rate of approximately 5.5 m/s is the safe upper limit; your parachute



must be able to provide a descent rate at or below that figure at your all-up flying weight.

If it's a choice between a vario and a parachute, buy a parachute first. Flying without a vario makes you a more sensitive pilot; flying without a parachute is likely to make you a statistic.