



## **SLCDA MAILING ADDRESS CHANGE**

Salt Lake City Department of Airports has a new mailing address. Please mail your hangar rent payment to the new address. If you pay your bill with an online bill pay or bank, please make sure to change the address with that company or your payment will not be on time! The new address is:  
PO Box 145550, Salt Lake City, UT 84114.

## **BEWARE THE DARK SIDE**

By Bruce Landsberg in AOPA Pilot Magazine

Sir Alec Guinness, as Jedi Knight Ben Obi-Wan Kenobi, advised young Luke Skywalker in the original 1977 Star Wars movie to beware the dark temptations of the human personality. It's good advice for pilots as well. Not only should we be on guard for the foibles and fantasies of overconfidence, but also for the tricks and temptations of the dark side of our planet, as in nighttime flight. Our night safety record could be far better, and most of the time just a little extra caution will do the trick.

First, some positives about doing it in the dark. There is much less traffic and you will likely have the pattern nearly to yourself. Any traffic that is out and about glows like a neon sign on the Vegas Strip. However, there are always exceptions so keep your head on a swivel.

En route, away from the main terminals and the city lights, any aircraft showing the requisite anti-collision lights will contrast beautifully with the night sky. In congested areas, though, visibility of aircraft lights mixed among ground lights diminishes greatly.

A search of the NTSB Accident Database reveals no big surprises but there are some items of interest. There were 382 fatal VFR night accidents in the past decade. About 11 per year, as much as anybody can tell, involved pilots attempting to continue VFR flight into instrument meteorological conditions (IMC). This subset of accidents is tough to investigate because it is frequently difficult to determine exactly what the conditions were at the time of the accident, other than to say that the pilot obviously didn't see what he ultimately hit. Those advocating an instrument rating for night flying privileges should know that nearly half the pilots in these accidents were instrument-rated, but obviously not thinking about obstruction avoidance.

On average, about three night-flying pilots per year were incapacitated by drugs, alcohol, or medical problems and another three took off with known deficiencies in the aircraft. About 11 per year tangled with wires or obstacles; we're not sure how that differs from the VMC-into-IMC accidents cited previously because the accidents occurred in both visual and instrument conditions. As an aside, four during the decade involved aerobatics at night; again not quite sure what to say about that, other than to decline the offer to ride along with those guys.

Direct to anywhere is easy in the dark, but we still don't see well and the weather is just as implacable as it ever was. Even in good VMC, a hillside with only a few lights disappears into the darkness. Mechanical malfunctions at night are possible, but since they don't happen often (about 4 percent of all night accidents studied) and since it is a fairly uncomfortable thought for those of us flying singles, dismiss it. Instead, focus on weather because of the disproportionate number of accidents after dark that involve low vis.

The nighttime fatal-accident picture is largely a cross-country phenomenon, so the solution is equally obvious... flight plan for terrain and towers and... don't go if you can't maintain visual ground contact.

The old warnings are still valid. Double personal ceiling and visibility minimums at night and if you have to fly VFR in the mountains after dark (something that many experienced mountain pilots simply won't do) consider tripling the numbers. If you wonder why experienced pilots don't mess around in the hills after dark, ask one sometime and be prepared for an earful.

Learn to read IFR charts with an emphasis on minimum altitudes. Of particular interest are the minimum en route altitude (MEA) and the minimum obstruction clearance altitude (MOCA). These should become your minimum VFR altitudes on an airway. Why not be a bit more

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conservative and use the off route obstruction clearance altitude (OROCA), which shows a safe altitude within the quadrangles of latitude and longitude? This altitude may not give full VOR coverage but if the flight is GPS direct, obstacle clearance is assured. If the forecast won't allow VFR flight at one of these altitudes then the decision is made... VFR isn't an option. Remember that in Class E airspace, which most of it is, the ceiling needs to be at least 500 feet above the MEA, MOCA, or OROCA, as appropriate, for proper cloud clearance. If the OEOCA is 3,000 feet, the forecast must exceed ceilings of 3,500 feet.

Suppose the forecast is OK, but in reality it isn't. Well, it's enough to say that as soon as the gut-gnawing feeling appears that the weather isn't as advertised and before you get into the clouds, it's time to execute the alternate plan. Don't get that uneasy sensation? You're not quite ready for VFR night cross-country flight, and you're way too naive to be playing in this environment.

The backup plan generally involves a significant change in direction-at least 90 degrees and likely more. Stay VFR and go to a good-size airport and land. This is not the time to be practicing short-field techniques. We're looking for a long runway, preferably with a rotating beacon and visual approach path guidance. GPS can help immeasurably with the safe execution. Push a button or two and there's a direct course and distance to a nearby airport.

Waited too long and the aircraft is enveloped in cloud? Clouds do have a way of materializing after dark. It's that pesky temperature and dew point relationship. Turn on the autopilot, if the aircraft is so equipped, and rotate the heading bug to the direction that is most likely to yield VMC. If you've been following instrument rules, the flight is already at the MEA, MOCA, or OROCA, so if you just entered clouds there is no danger of colliding with terrain or an obstacle. Land now and resolve not to get into that circumstance again.

If you feel uncomfortable flying in IMC-like conditions, then limit your night flying to bright moonlit evenings or stay in very well-lit areas. If you feel comfortable flying in IMC but are not rated or are rusty, consider going up with a CFI at night and seeing how proficient you really are. Many night accidents were caused by pilots feeling better about their skills than the results would support.

Flying below minimum altitudes to stay under the clouds and maintain visual contact is dumb... no other way to



## HELPFUL POINTS OF CONTACT

**For GA operational, facilities maintenance, aviation newsletter, airfield, and SLC Title 16 questions call:** Steve Jackson, SLCDA General Aviation Manager, 647-5532 or e-mail at [steve.jackson@slcgov.com](mailto:steve.jackson@slcgov.com).

**For hangar lease and repair questions call:** Mike Rawson, Properties Management Specialist, at 575-2894 or e-mail at [mike.rawson@slcgov.com](mailto:mike.rawson@slcgov.com).

**For aviation security questions call:** Connie Proctor at 575-2401.

**For gate access problems call:** Airport Control Center at 575-2401.

**For emergencies call:** at SLCIA, 575-2405  
at TVY or U42, 911 then 575-2405

**For common General Aviation information call the GA Hotline: 575-2443**

describe it. In flat terrain the IFR minimums provide 1,000 feet of terrain or obstacle clearance, and in mountains, the margin is increased to 2,000 feet. The way to safety is up-not down. That's as counterintuitive as pushing forward in a stall to start flying again, but it works. Down low there is stuff to hit... guaranteed. Climb and the only things up there are air and the very occasional IFR flight. The odds are overwhelmingly in your favor that a collision will not occur.

An inadvertent encounter is allowed, provided that it; a) scares the bejeebers out of the pilot and b) he or she vows never to get into that situation again. The death penalty is too strong a punishment for that type of transgression and that is what descending frequently entails. The objective here is to learn well and live to fly again... not to experience the always jarring and often fatal sudden stop!

All of the suggestions here also apply to daytime flight except that clouds are much easier to see and there is far less excuse for inadvertently getting into weather. A little discipline and some common sense will save dozens of lives and millions of dollars annually.

## TVY ILS NEARS COMPLETION

The localizer approach at the Tooele Valley Airport was successfully FAA flight tested in December so when the new approach procedures are published in February, the ILS approach for TVY should be in it. The glide slope was not signed off and probably will not be until mid-January... so if it does not make it by the deadline the full approach will be published but limited to a "localizer only" approach until it is fully certified. Anyone attempting to do a full ILS will find no glide slope signal and will be forced to use only the localizer signal.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

Looking for a great place to fly into for a free breakfast?

**Leading Edge Aviation** in Logan (LGU) holds a monthly breakfast on the 2nd Saturday of every month 8:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. in the hangar. They'd enjoy seeing you there!

*Have a Happy and Safe New Year!*