



Don't fall out of your parachute

Observations on safety

IT'S TIME TO CLIMB BACK ONTO my soapbox and share some of my concerns. I would like to talk about some safety issues I have preached about over the years in several of my columns about issues that keep rearing their ugly heads. I can't be everywhere to observe how you adjust your parachute, store it, or where you take it to be serviced. So I need your help.

I can only tell you what I have observed. This is where I need you to be my eyes in the field. What I observe usually occurs when I receive a parachute from a new customer sent to me for servicing the first time. What I see over and over are parachutes so far out of adjustment that if the person were to use it in an emergency, he or she would stand a very good chance of falling out of the harness or being seriously injured from the straps or metal hardware. Please, when you see this, speak up.

When I receive a parachute where the rubber bands holding the lines in place are embrittled and broken (see photo), I question whether it was actually packed or just signed off. Rubber bands do not wear out or become damaged overnight or between 180-day repacks. If that parachute truly had been packed, why were the rubber bands not replaced?

Parachutes arrive in my shop often missing elastic keepers. This may not seem important to you, but they hold the excess webbing in place after you have adjusted your harness. They help prevent the webbing from blowing in the wind and snagging on some part of your aircraft when you are trying to claw your way out. It is



Brittle, broken rubber bands holding the lines in place are a sign of long-term damage and should be replaced.

already a bad day, and getting hung up on some part of your disabled aircraft will only make a bad day worse. Be mindful of this on your own parachute as well as on others.

Closing loops are another issue. I often find them several inches out of tolerance. Why were the closing loops (that the rip cord pins go through) not replaced or shortened back to factory specifications? This is something your parachute rigger should not overlook.

When I receive a parachute that looks like it was left out in the sun and has extensive UV damage or is covered with dirt and grime, I wonder what goes on in that person's mind. This is a lifesaving piece of equipment worthy of better treatment. It is not something that can be indiscriminately tossed about and expected to work properly if

needed. Just today I received a parachute covered with oil and grease. I wouldn't even lay it on my packing table without first putting something on the table. It was not quite bad enough to condemn out, but I still had to clean my packing table afterward so I didn't contaminate the next parachute I serviced.

Proper parachute adjustment, careful professional rigger attention, and thoughtful user care are just a few reasons why your parachute should be serviced on a regular basis by a rigger who is thoroughly familiar with it. Almost every day I receive parachutes with worn-out parts. Spare parts are easy to order from the manufacturer, and many can be fabricated with the proper equipment. While your rigger may be doing a good job in keeping you safe, worn or missing parts need to be re-

placed. And they should know they can turn on a computer and find the latest packing manuals. All have pictures to help pack your parachute. The manufacturers also have phone numbers and e-mail addresses to contact for assistance. There is absolutely no excuse for your parachute to be poorly packed and maintained.

Many of you ship your parachute to your rigger, and others just drop it off and pick it up in a few days. Whether you ship or drop it off, why not consider pulling the rip cord for practice? I don't need the practice—I've pulled thousands of ripcords—but you likely do. Make sure the area you choose is clean and clear of obstacles. I would caution you, however; don't pull the rip cord near your Ming dynasty vase. The spring-loaded pilot chute will fly out several feet. Don't be afraid to remove your parachute from the container and look at it, but **be very, very careful** not to snag the suspension lines on the scratchy part of the Velcro tape or on anything else. This could cause considerable damage to them and can be expensive to repair. Pretty much every manufacturer uses Velcro tape or something similar to help hold things closed, and this is good. But, be careful.

When you're finished having fun, carefully place your parachute and the lines in a plastic garbage bag, so they cannot come in contact with the scratchy part of the Velcro tape. Remember: Never put loose Styrofoam chips in the box with your parachute. They get into everything and are very difficult to remove. If you must use them to fill out the box, put them into a separate bag, and seal it so they will not come in contact with your parachute.

This is where I'd like you to come in. You are my eyes in the field. *Please step up to the plate when you observe something about a parachute that looks out of place and say something.* You might suggest to your fellow pilot that he/she contact his or her rigger. I am also more than happy to talk to anyone you think has a potential

life-threatening problem related to his or her parachute. You could also suggest pilots go to my website and check out several of my columns that discuss how to properly care for and wear a parachute. All my columns are listed on my website. Go to my home page and click on "Ask Allen." Here are several columns you may find useful: March 2014, September 2013, August 2012, August 2011, November 2010, and April 2010. All deal with what I've been talking about. I also have several articles on my website that may be helpful. Just click on the word "Articles" on my home page.

If you question the fit of your parachute or someone else's, consider taking a photograph or two and e-mailing them to me. A photo is worth a thousand words, and it allows me to quickly see if there is a problem. Safety is everyone's business. Or as Smokey Bear says, "Only you can prevent forest fires." Oops, that's another phrase worth remembering. Maybe our phrase should be, "I can help prevent another disaster." Be proactive. Good friends and good parachutes save lives.

I also encourage you to go to the EAA website and watch the webinar I gave on May 21 of this year. All the webinars are free. Go to www.EAA.org/webinar. Once there, scroll down a bit, and just below the word **WEBINAR**, click on "View the EAA Webinar archives." Once on this page, in the upper left corner, is the search window. Type in "Emergency Bailout Seminar." My webinar will appear at the top of the many other great webinars. Click it on, sit back, and enjoy. I've been told it goes down well with a cold beverage and popcorn.

Continuing education is always important to me. Have you or your organization considered a bailout seminar? Mine are always free. Travel expenses and a glass of wine or cold beer are extra. Until we meet again. I would also like to thank Marilyn, my partner and in-house editor, for her insight and input. **IAC**

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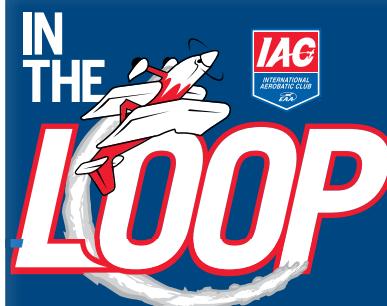
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