



SAFETY

# Dusting Off the Cobwebs

Safety – Ask Allen

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**FOR THOSE OF YOU** who are coming out of winter hibernation, it's time to start thinking about putting away the skis or returning from your winter home in some warm exotic place. Flying season is now upon us. **Will you be prepared?** The time to start dusting the cobwebs off your parachute, aircraft and, most importantly, yourself is here.

Now is the time to start thinking about your emergency procedures. This step applies not just to your bailout procedures but also all your emergency procedures. In my experience, most emergencies that come up could have been avoided with proper preventive measures. The first line of defense is you practicing your emergency procedures before and after each flight until they become muscle memory. This action easily can cut your response time by 50 percent or more.

I specialize in emergency bailout training and the use of survival equipment, such as your Nomex flying clothing and your helmet. How about organizing or attending a bailout/survival equipment seminar in your area? I'm finalizing how-to Zoom seminars. Please consider hosting a seminar from me or someone else in your area. If it is not possible, I have a webinar on the EAA website that is free and goes down quite well with a nice glass of wine or a cold beer. Go to SilverParachutes.com and click on the link (about halfway down my home page). I will be booking Zoom presentations soon. This option



will be an excellent choice for those groups that do not have the budget to fly me all over the country. Being up close and personal is what I would like to do, but with our current COVID-19 situation, your safety is my first concern.

Now is a good time for me to discuss some of the ongoing problems continually popping up that could affect your safety. I may not pack parachutes anymore, but pilots still call or email me with their questions and concerns. You do not have to be a customer to contact me.

I just discovered that videoconferencing is a fantastic way to communicate. Let's face it — Zoom is here to stay. I've had pilots Zoom with me and show me a problem they may have with their parachute. A picture or a Zoom meeting is truly worth a thousand words. Recently, a pilot wondered why his parachute was constantly falling off his shoulders. I explained it was so far out of adjustment that during a bailout, he and his parachute may become separated, kind of like an ugly divorce. I showed him how to adjust his parachute, and he was good to go. All you need to do is contact me. Don't forget that your parachute rigger is usually the first person you should contact. After a long winter, your parachute probably needs a current repack, anyway.

What I am most concerned about are pilots new to aerobatics who have had little or no firsthand training on the ins and outs of their parachute and other survival equipment. In a perfect world, I would like to see everyone return their parachute(s) to the factory or to a

factory representative at least once every few years to make sure their expensive cushion has been receiving the tender loving care it deserves from you or your rigger. Unfortunately, there are riggers who are not as familiar with pilot emergency parachutes as they should be. Having another set of eyes occasionally inspect your expensive cushion may not be a bad idea.

Does your rigger spend time with you and answer all the questions about your parachute that you may have? I feel it's a disservice if I sold you a parachute or packed your parachute, and you did not fully understand how to properly adjust, wear, and use it when I returned it to you.

A while back (now quite a while), I had two new customers fly to my airport and pick up their new parachutes. I spent over an hour with them until I felt confident that they had an excellent chance of survival in case of an emergency bailout. I also went over how to egress their aircraft. In addition, they left with my bailout seminar handout material, which is available to anyone on the home page of my

website. They left with the understanding that they could call or email me anytime with questions. That also goes for those of you who are not my customers. I am very specialized and have serviced only pilot emergency parachutes in my shop for over 40 years and spent 18 of my 25 years in the Air Force servicing all types of survival equipment. After packing close to 45,000 parachutes, I retired from packing parachutes, about five years ago, to the delight of my hands.

I have had numerous articles published over the years addressing many of the issues you might like to know more about, such as how to properly take care of your parachute, putting it on and off, and of course, how to pull that shiny silver ripcord handle. I may sound like a broken record, or is it now a broken CD? But I constantly received parachutes in my shop that needed a generous helping of TLC. Just having your parachute packed occasionally, at the closest place, may be cost effective and may save you time, but will it save your life in an emergency? There are areas where you can save, but not getting proper servicing for your parachute is not one of them. You need to make sure your rigger is tending to you and your expensive cushion properly.



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SAFETY



First, start off with proper adjustment and fit. Put your parachute on. Bend at the waist and tighten the straps as you normally would and then straighten up. Your parachute should be nice and snug. You should *not* be able to lift up the portion of the harness that goes over your shoulders by more than about half an inch. You need to make sure your parachute stays with you when it is deploying. Does your parachute (**see photo above**) look like this? If yes, you need to adjust or have your rigger adjust it *before you go flying again*. If you ship your parachute to your rigger, call to give them your height and weight. Maybe send or email a photo with it on so the rigger can better understand what's going on. Many riggers hand tack the webbing in place after making the necessary adjustments so it doesn't slip between repacks. In an emergency bailout, if your parachute is out of adjustment, it could cause you severe injury during deployment. An example is the chest strap if you have one. This problem could cause severe injury to your neck and/or face if your harness is not adjusted properly. For more information about this problem, read Kirill Barsukov's account, titled "Mid Air Collision," in the February 2012 issue of *Sport Aerobatics*.

Now, if you are still with me, I'd like to discuss two other items that kept appearing in my shop — checking the length of the pack closing loop(s) and the condition of the rubber bands. I have harped on these two issues before. First, let's go over the rubber bands. Does your rigger have replacement rubber bands? They do not last forever and need replacing from time to time. These rubber bands hold your

lines in place and help to properly sequence the opening of your parachute. If your rubber bands are rotted and/or weak, your suspension lines could fall out of them easily. This problem can cause an out-of-sequence opening. You and/or your deploying parachute could become entangled. If you ship your parachute to your rigger, you can check the rubber bands yourself by donning your parachute and practice pulling the ripcord and inspecting them. Make sure you keep your parachute and especially the suspension lines away from the scratchy part of any Velcro tape. Now locate the rubber bands. If you pull up on them and they are pitted, sticky to the touch, or very weak when you pull on them, they need to be replaced. I went through 5-10 pounds of rubber bands a year. They will easily last for many repacks if you properly store your parachute. Keep in mind they will deteriorate a lot faster if you live in a hot and humid climate or store your parachute in a hot place like the trunk of your car.

Since you now have your container open, check the length and condition of the closing loop(s) that the ripcord pins go through. They are what hold the container closed. The specs are in your owner's manual. The closing loops will always stretch between repacks and *must* be either shortened back to factory specs or replaced if worn. If they have not been checked and replaced in a long time, they usually will be at least one or more inches out of tolerance. The closing loops keep your spring-loaded pilot chute properly centered and compressed so it can launch far away from you when you pull the ripcord. They keep your ripcord pins from slipping and coming out prematurely. The closing loop(s) must be within factory specs. You do not want your parachute accidentally deploying on the ramp to the amusement of your fellow pilots.

Remember, practice, practice, practice.

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Allen Silver owns and operates Silver Parachute Sales & Service located in Sonora, California. He has been an FAA Master Rigger since 1974 and in 1991 was designated as a Parachute Rigger Examiner for the FAA. He has also served three terms as the chairman of the Parachute Industry Association (PIA) Rigging Committee, a worldwide organization that represents the parachute industry. He has over 3200 parachute jumps as a sport and professional skydiver for 55 years. Allen has over 1900 plus hours of flight time, of which more than 1200 are in a Marchetti SF-260. *IAGC*

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