

For safety's sake—
and because they want to be involved

How Good is Your Passenger Briefing?

By Dale DeRemer



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A Cessna 206 amphibian took off from a paved strip on its way to the owner's camp on a pristine, remote lake about an hour away.

But the pilot was distracted by a momentarily crowded traffic pattern and forgot to put the gear up. Nor did he notice the few knots lower airspeed enroute to the camp. His three excited passengers had engaged him in a lively fishing discussion, and the gear down/up check didn't get accomplished during the approach. The result was the classic amphibian noseover. The pilot and front-seat passenger were able to get out of the flooding cabin, but the two passengers in the back seat drowned. The surviving passenger testified that there was no passenger briefing provided by the pilot. The lawsuits against the pilot and his estate are still ongoing. There are those who wish him tried for manslaughter.

This scenario is not a new one. In fact, it has happened many times. To prevent this sort of tragedy, seaplane pilots are encouraged to seek water egress training and provide passengers with an effective briefing so they will know how to extract themselves from a flooding cabin (and maybe even save the pilot if he is incapacitated), as well as know how to safely function in and around seaplanes. So, how good is the passenger briefing you give, and how could it be improved?

Certainly there is no argument that a good passenger briefing is needed. A 15-year study of seaplane accidents in North America, covering 103 accidents on water, revealed that 61 percent of the pilots died. Of those, 78 percent died inside the aircraft cabin, and of those, 81 percent drowned. Of those who drowned, 14 percent were incapacitated from non-fatal impact forces and subsequently drowned, and 67 percent died from drowning alone, with no other injuries sustained. Statistics for the passengers were similarly tragic. Many were found still in their seatbelts and unharmed except for drowning. (see <http://www.tsb.gc.ca/en/reports/air/studies/sa9401/sa9401.asp>)

WHY A GOOD PASSENGER BRIEFING

I have discovered that, in addition to saving lives and preventing injuries,

there are other good reasons to give a thorough briefing. It seems that whenever I level with passengers regarding those tough-to-talk-about safety issues, they (now trained from my briefing) willingly accept responsibility for their own egress from the cabin and mentally become a part of the trained crew. They seem eager to learn more and to take on more responsibility, so I give them more to occupy their thoughts (see below). After the flight, they will often say, "That was fun, I learned so much."

PASSENGER INVOLVEMENT

It's not difficult to get passengers involved during the flight. If we are in an amphibian, the preflight briefing includes how to visually inspect to see that the wheels are up for water landing. After the passenger practices wheels-up inspection on their side of the aircraft the first time, they are usually way ahead of me, doing their inspection before I ask for it.

All passengers, including youngsters, are good at spotting other aircraft. I involve them in some CRM, asking them to point to the other aircraft but not to point out anything but other aircraft. Once they become experienced with that, I may add conflicting watercraft and underwater obstacles to the list of potential hazards they should warn me about. Passengers enjoy practicing the sterile cockpit rule, too. I have heard passengers say "Sterile cockpit!" to another passenger who was talking about trivia during final approach. It is amazing how passengers enjoy becom-

ing responsible members of the crew rather than just "geese" (an old airline term for the bodies in the back that are just along for the ride).

THE PREFLIGHT BRIEFING

Can the passenger hear about all the bad-news scenarios and still want to fly with you? My experience indicates the answer is an unequivocal "Yes!" if the passenger is properly briefed. The passenger needs to know how to get out of an inverted airplane, even with an incapacitated pilot. The passenger needs to hear that the pilot cares. If it is apparent that the person responsible for the flight cares, and if the passenger is made to feel a part of the crew (with responsibilities), most of the fear caused by hearing about what might possibly happen is dispelled.

A good briefing should be one that is specially developed by the pilot for the situation, taking into account pilot experience, equipment, environment, and mission. It should succeed at improving safety and building passenger confidence. If it is your creation you will find it easier to give, but it is still a good idea to develop a briefing checklist and use it so that you don't leave anything important out.

Allow enough time to present the briefing so that you don't feel like you are burning valuable daylight. A well-composed and presented briefing will return a big helping of good feeling to the pilot, and that is reason enough to do a complete passenger briefing every time!



Allow enough time to give your passenger a calm and complete briefing.

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DEVELOPING THE PASSENGER BRIEFING

Every responsible pilot should develop his or her own passenger briefing and checklist to be sure that all necessary topics are addressed. The passenger briefing must be crafted to fit the aircraft used, the environmental conditions, and the pilot's own style.

To help you develop or improve your own personal passenger briefing, I'd like to suggest a resource. The most comprehensive pilot's passenger briefing and discussion I have seen can be viewed at <http://www.secureav.com/seaplane-briefing.doc>. It is a fine resource to use as a guide when developing or improving your own passenger briefing. It was developed by a team of highly experienced seaplane pilots and improved by review and critique of many other accomplished seaplane pilots. I recommend it highly.

The site is a tool for developing your own passenger briefings, which you may want to add as unofficial supplements to your Pilots Operating Handbook (POH). The site also includes a sample briefing. (See sidebar.)

I'll conclude with some words taken from an introductory message on the site.

There are many important reasons why seaplane pilots should provide passenger briefings:

To fulfill their responsibilities as pilot in command for the safe operation of their aircraft;

To improve passenger safety;

To satisfy FAA regulations (such as 14 C.F.R. 91.107) that require passenger briefings; and

To help passengers understand that their survival during an accident is highly dependent on their knowledge and use of safety information. ■

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SAMPLE SEAPLANE PASSENGER BRIEFING

Before entering the cabin:

- (1) How to enter and exit the cabin. Avoidance of propellers and stabilizer.
- (2) Smoking or other restrictions.
- (3) Egress following upset:
 - a. Leave carry-on items behind;
 - b. Establish situational awareness;
 - c. Clear a pathway out;
 - d. Establish a reference handhold, then release seatbelt;
 - e. Exit using hand-over-hand technique;
 - f. How to wear and when to inflate flotation gear; and
 - g. What to do once outside the seaplane.
- (4) Fire extinguishers, first aid kits, survival gear, ELT, stowage of carry-on items, loose items, and aircraft equipment.
- (5) Passengers needing special assistance, including passengers who are weak or non-swimmers.
- (6) Additional considerations that are best discussed before entering cabin (from above list or your materials).

After entering the cabin:

- (7) Safety belt and shoulder harness operation, and stowage of loose end of the seatbelt.
- (8) Release of seatbelt, including when buckle is inverted.
- (9) Seat operation to enhance egress.
- (10) Adjustable seatback upright and latched for takeoff and landing.
- (11) An appropriate brace position.
- (12) Location and operation of each normal and emergency exit, including unlatching doors, if appropriate.
- (13) Pre-landing briefing.
- (14) Pre-docking briefing.
- (15) Additional in-cabin considerations (from above list or your materials).