



[DALE DEREMER]

# Floatplane BRIEFING for Passengers

Making your passengers feel welcome, safe and involved will make the ride smooth for everybody.

## Have you ever heard the story about the famous educator of physicians

who made each prospective medical doctor check into the hospital for a complete physical? This was done so the medical student could endure all the indignities that are put upon the patient, drafty open-backed gown and all. The intention was to help the young doctor understand the feelings of his future patients.

And so it was for me when one day, as a seaplane pilot, I was offered a ride in a Caravan on floats. To make my lesson complete, fate dealt me a pilot who knew nothing about briefing passengers. The entire instruction consisted of, “Get in.” I selected the seat in the second row directly behind the pilot. I found my seatbelt and, fortunately, I knew what to do with it. I looked around for the location of the personal floatation devices, but didn’t see them. I knew where the door was

that I had just come through but had no idea how to open it. It looked very strong — like I might never be able to get it open — and I felt closed in.

Two other invited SPA field directors, who were sitting to my right, looked around as if they too weren’t sure they liked their situation. It seemed as if they had also expected a little attention — at least a basic safety briefing. But this company pilot’s pre-departure briefing consisted of a slight turn of the head in our direction and the words, “Everybody ready?” as he advanced the power levers. Now we were really feeling uneasy!

The rest of the tale is a long horror story. We never got off the water that trip, but the pilot still managed to scare three seasoned seaplane

pilots. We couldn’t get out of that airplane fast enough. When we did, we headed straight for the bar and didn’t return to the water for the rest of the day.

During those 15 minutes in that airplane, I had experienced apprehension, uncertainty, discomfort that I was in that situation and anger that I had been treated the way I was. In addition, I had been exposed to what I perceived as a dangerous environment. Those 15 minutes changed the way I treat passengers and students in a seaplane. Now, they get the most complete briefing I can give them and I involve them in the flight so they will feel like they are a part of the crew. Passengers are told what to expect next, very much like a CRM (crew resource management) crew briefing before each manoeuvre.

### Passenger Involvement

It is 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 wheel-up inspection on their side of the aircraft, they are usually way ahead of me and start their inspection before I ask for it.

All passengers, including youngsters, are good at spotting other aircraft and pointing them out to me during flight. I involve them in some CRM, asking them to point to the

An upset floatplane will generally float indefinitely and the tragedy is that those on board may survive the accident only to drown in their seats. A proper briefing goes a long way to helping passengers save themselves.





Battered but still basically intact, the airframe is typical of the condition of many floatplanes that upset. Surviving such a mishap is enhanced if passengers have basic knowledge of the action they need to take to get out.

other aircraft but not point at anything other than an aircraft. Passengers enjoy practicing the Sterile Cockpit Rule, too. I have heard passengers say, “sterile cockpit,” to another passenger who is talking about trivia during final approach. It is amazing how passengers enjoy being a responsible member 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 Seaplane Briefing

Can a passenger hear about all the “bad news” scenarios and still want to go flying with you? My experience indicates the answer is a resounding, “Yes,” if the passenger is properly briefed and involved as a crewmember with responsibilities. The passenger needs to know everything necessary to be able to get out of an inverted airplane, even with an incapacitated pilot, and needs to know their pilot

cares. If the person responsible for the flight cares and if the passenger feels important to the flight, then most of the fear the passenger has is dispelled because they learned about what could happen.

A good briefing should be specially developed by the pilot for the situation. If the passenger is involved, it will improve safety and build passenger confidence. A well-done briefing will return a big helping of pride for the pilot and that’s reason enough to do a complete passenger briefing every time.

Flying friendly with passengers also means shallow banks, pre-briefing any unusual manoeuvre — getting close to obstacles, short lake takeoffs or sudden manoeuvres — selecting flight times that minimize turbulence, keeping the flight short, and continuously checking on passenger comfort and state-of-mind. In short, letting the passenger know you care and making the passenger feel special is an important form of “flying friendly” as well as a strong safety statement.

### Developing Passenger Briefing

Every responsible pilot develops his or her own passenger-briefing checklist to

ensure all topics are covered. The passenger briefing must be crafted so that it fits the aircraft, the environmental conditions and the pilot’s style.

To help you develop or improve your own personal passenger briefing, I suggest viewing [www.secureav.com/seaplane-briefing.doc](http://www.secureav.com/seaplane-briefing.doc). It was developed by a team of highly experienced seaplane pilots, and improved from the review and critique of many other seaplane pilots.

While you are online, you might want to take a look at the *Seaplane Pilots Model Code of Conduct*. It is just another tool you can use to improve your professionalism as a seaplane pilot.

### Postflight Briefing

Whenever I “level” with a passenger, regarding those “tough-to-talk-about” safety issues, the passenger (now trained from my briefing) willingly accepts responsibility for their own egress from the cabin and mentally becomes a part of the trained crew. They seem eager to learn more and to take on more responsibility. After the flight, they often say, “That was fun. I learned so much.”

## PREFLIGHT PASSENGER SAFETY

It is up to us as pilots to include a good safety briefing because we know:

- 50% to 60% of seaplane accidents happen during takeoff
- 67% of passenger fatalities were found in a recent Canadian study to be caused by drowning, without other incapacitation
- The floatplane’s ultimate stability is achieved after upset
- In order to take advantage of the good news (that upset floatplanes will usually float forever), those inside must know how to get out and what to do after egress
- One accident where passengers inside are found without a mark on them, sitting in their seats with seatbelts fastened but drowned, is one accident too many (unfortunately, there have been a few of these)
- If we have an accident on the water, some passengers drown but one survives to testify that we didn’t give a proper passenger briefing, probably condemnation in the courtroom will be our reward.

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