



CIVL Paragliding Competitions Safety Task Force

Letter of Introduction

Luxembourg, 27 August, 2011

Fellow members of the paragliding community!

By now you will likely have heard about CIVL's Paragliding Competitions Safety Task Force and its mandate. With this letter, I would like to introduce the members of our group and provide you with some insights into our thinking, our work, and how we intend to proceed.

The following are our core group members:

Gregory Knudson (LUX)

-CIVL delegate, competition pilot, aviation professional (safety/accident investigation background)

Hannes Papesh (AUT)

-Designer/manufacturer

Jörg Ewald (SUI)

-Competition pilot and organiser

John Walton (NZ)

-Legal counsel/mediator, long-time paragliding pilot

Josh Cohn (USA)

-Competition pilot

Louise Joselyn (GBR)

-CIVL secretary, CIVL steward and competition organiser

Mads Syndergaard (DEN)

-Competition pilot and organiser

Russel Ogden (GBR)

-Competition pilot, professional test-pilot

Torsten Siegel (GER)

-Competition pilot, professional test-pilot

In forming this team, the primary aim was to select individuals from within the paragliding community, with good communication skills, who can think analytically in an open-minded manner, and who are capable of suspending their personal opinions (at least until the fact-gathering process had been completed). Although not every interest of the paragliding community is necessarily represented by the core team at present, we will be inviting specific experts from specialist fields into the project later.

As I see it, our work is similar to that of an accident investigation team. With regards to our task, rather than beginning with a theory or a preconceived agenda, we will start with a blank slate and try not to make conclusions until presented with facts. The process is straight forward—gather as much data as possible (both empirical and qualitative), analyse it, then form observations and draw conclusions.

Since it is likely that our safety issues are not the result of one underlying cause, but an intricate combination of causes, we will be evaluating all potential sources of risk—not just the gliders. To do this, we will engage the help of manufacturers, competition pilots and organisers, team-leaders, testing institutions, and even experts from non-paragliding related fields. Though we are still very much at the beginning of our work, many people have already offered their assistance. A special thanks goes to Alain Zoller of Air Turquoise, Hans Bausenwein of the PMA, and Martin Scheel of the OCTWG. We will be in close contact with them and many others in the near future. If you feel you have a significant proposal, observation, or suggestion that may be of help, please don't wait for us to contact you. We welcome all input and will give consideration to all serious proposals.

I now wish to draw your attention to a subject that is crucial to our work. Until recently, CIVL has had a very limited ability to record incidents or accidents at competitions. Obviously, the first step in improving any safety culture begins not only with an objective evaluation, but with ensuring there is a reliable monitoring system in place. I am very pleased to announce that CIVL now has an operational online reporting system. It goes without saying, that if we are to begin any kind of serious investigation, it is essential that from now on, all incidents and accidents at Cat 1 and 2 sanctioned events be reported via this online system. We urge all pilots (not only competition organisers) to begin filing these reports. Multiple reports of the same incidents are welcome. To find out more, please visit the FAI/CIVL website.

In conclusion, I do not wish speculate as to what solutions will eventually be proposed. In the end, perhaps we will all be somewhat surprised. Obviously, there is a lot of work to be done first. In the meantime, in addition to its current efforts to determine the causes of the recent incidents that resulted in the suspension of open class gliders from Category 1 events, the Task Force will be busy drafting a contingency plan for the 2012 season.

Should you have any questions, comments, or proposals, please feel free to contact me at your convenience (gregory_knudson@hotmail.com).

Sincerely,

Gregory Knudson
CIVL Task Force Chairman