

Where are we going?

Kevin Price, CCSC Safety Officer

My topic for today concerns tow operations...or perhaps I should say destinations. First and foremost, let me say that in my 1.5 years or so of flying at CCSC I have been generally impressed with our tow pilots. No one has scared me yet (or even come close to it), and I find they are amazingly consistent in terms of airspeed control and smoothness. They are typically very good about taking us upwind and toward an area of promising lift, so much so that some of us may have become complacent about where we are being taken.

The Tow Handbook says to “Plan your flight path to be upwind of the glider port at release altitude.” While that guidance is generally followed, occasionally traffic conflicts, a change in winds or some other factor results in reaching release altitude some distance downwind of the gliderport. When winds are light, I suppose it doesn’t matter much if at all. But what is light? Is my light your light? Also, how many tow pilots...or glider pilots...know the exact winds aloft for the day? For those that have flown aircraft with wind readouts, you’ll know that quite significant wind shifts and speed changes can occur within just a couple of thousand feet. (Once at Ft Wayne I saw the wind go from a 50 knot crosswind at pattern altitude to less than a 10 knot headwind on final.)

To help us all know the winds aloft for the day, Brian Stoops is working to put a white board on the trailer which will include the weather, NOTAMS, etc for the day. Each PIC is responsible for knowing that information and it will now be much easier to obtain it. As part of your preflight preparations, are you forming a mental picture of where you want to be when you release? Why let the tow pilot take you where you don’t want ..or perhaps even shouldn’t... go? Are you monitoring where you are being towed? Remember those tow plane steering signals you practiced for and performed on your FAA checkride? Well, it would be nice to put those to use from time to time, both for practice (for you and the tow pilot) as well as for practical reasons (i.e., you don’t like where you are going).