



Allen Silver

Ask Allen

A master rigger answers your questions about parachutes.

By Allen Silver, IAC 431160

Instead of a question, I'd like to open with some comments. I want to share the "good news!" This is not a religious statement, although some of you may fly on a wing and a prayer. What I want to share with you is that your parachute can now be packed on a 180-day cycle! This gives you an extra 60 days before you need a repack and recertification. Let me take a moment to thank my son, Darrin, for his help in seeing me through this three-year project to completion. Without his writing skills, the proposal could still be sitting on someone's desk in Washington, D.C.

The new law went into effect on December 19, 2008. By the time you read this, your parachute will be current if packed within the preceding 180 days. Let me clear up some of the confusion about the interim time frame. Prior to December 19, the law stated that your parachute must have been packed within the preceding 120 days. However, on December 19, the rules changed and that same parachute now must have been packed within the preceding 180 days. It doesn't matter that the last repack and recertification was under the old rules.

Here is an example: Suppose your parachute was packed under the old law on October 12, 2008. The next repack is due 120 days later on February 9, 2009. But, the law changed on December 19, 2008, and now states that the same parachute must have been packed within the preceding 180 days. This means the new due date is March 21, 2009, and you've just picked up an additional 40 days. There are some of you out there who will fall into this category as you read this.

What if your parachute was due for a repack on, let's say, December 15, 2008, under the old 120-day rule? The parachute would not be legal to wear on the 16th, 17th, and 18th. But if you waited (and did not use your parachute) until December 19, you could then recalculate the due date based on the new 180-day law.

By the middle of April 2009, this will all be a moot issue and everyone will be on the new 180-day cycle. No matter how confusing this may appear, it's now the law and your parachute is current if packed within the preceding 180 days. If you want more information, go to www.SilverParachutes.com and click on "News Flash! 180-Day Parachute Repacks Have Arrived."

Q: What side of the aircraft should I jump from?

A: Some owner's manuals (especially warbirds) may suggest a preferred exit side to use during a bailout. The reason may be based on physics or aerodynamics, but don't assume there is only one way to escape your aircraft in an emergency. Rarely will you encounter a textbook emergency so you must be prepared to try all options. The best scenario is that your out-of-control aircraft is experiencing negative Gs, you jettison the canopy, release your seat belts, and are ejected from the aircraft without any effort on your part.



Don't plan on that to happen. If you have to bail out, things are already not going your way. Do whatever it takes to crawl and claw your way free of the aircraft. If you can't get out of one side, try the other side. If that doesn't work, try the first side again. What have you got to lose? In my bailout seminars I teach pilots never to give up. What may not have worked the first or second time, may work on the third or fourth try.

Of course, if you have a door only on one side, like on a Citabria, then you're pretty much committed to perfecting the quickest method of releasing it. Although, you do have the side window, and you could possibly kick out the front window if necessary (you get really strong when you're scared). Find out what is unique about your aircraft and commit it to memory. Look around your aircraft for handholds or someplace to put your back or feet to get better leverage. Do this before your next flight, because it could be your last. You can never be too prepared in the event of an emergency. Remember, practice makes perfect.

Don't forget to properly brief your passengers. Not only will they be better prepared, but showing others what to do will help reinforce your own procedures so you'll react quickly and not have to think about what to do. In training sessions, I've helped people cut their egress time by 50 percent or more just by practicing the emergency procedures before and after each flight.

I wish all of you the best this coming year. Please keep the questions coming, and maybe I'll be fortunate enough to give your group a bailout seminar this year. 