



Allen Silver

By Allen Silver, IAC 431160

Ask Allen

A master rigger answers your questions about parachutes.

Q: What's going on with the NPRM regarding the 180-day repack cycle?

A: I'm constantly being asked the status of this important issue. The simple answer is I don't know. The public comment period for the notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM) closed in August of 2007. Once it goes behind the closed doors of the FAA, employees cannot discuss it. However, the clock is ticking for the FAA. The administration has 18 months from the closing date of the comment period to either reject the proposal or turn it into a law that we can print out and read. That means we may have to wait until February 2009 for the official word. Even if the FAA was to say today that it's a done deal, we could not arbitrarily extend the current repack by 60 days. The new rule has to be in writing before we sing hallelujah and praise the FAA. Then, and only then, can you take your expensive cushion in for a repack, lube, and oil change every 180 days.

Q: Should I ship my parachute to my rigger in its carry bag?

A: A carry bag is the ideal first line of protection against anything entering the shipping box. The added weight of the carry bag does not add much to the shipping cost. Now is not the time to scrimp on protecting your parachute. This past winter I received two parachutes in boxes that had gotten wet in transit. One of the parachutes was not in a carry bag, and the harness/container as well as the parachute canopy were damp. The second parachute was in a box that was soaked, but the parachute was dry because it was inside its protective carry bag. If your carry bag is made out of Cordura, it offers a great deal of protection from moisture. In the absence of a carry bag, put your parachute in a plastic garbage bag before placing it in your shipping box. It's not a bad idea to place it in a plastic bag even if

you already have your parachute in its carry bag. A little extra protection can go along way.

Q: What's a "hard deck"?

A: It has nothing to do with poker, but everything to do with gambling with your life. A hard deck is the altitude where you stop trying to fix a serious problem, bail out, and let the insurance company become the new owner of your airplane. Of course, the ultimate hard deck is the ground! The important thing to understand when determining your hard deck is how much time your parachute needs to fully deploy.

Even though your parachute opens very quickly, I suggest a minimum of 2,000 feet above ground level, but that's up to you. Remember: Altitude above, like runway behind, does you no good if you're running out of time. An out-of-control aircraft can easily lose a thousand feet every three to five seconds. Does your hard deck leave you enough time to execute your escape plan and still have time to deploy your parachute? How long does your parachute take to open, and how much loss of altitude can you expect? This is your homework assignment. For help, go to www.SilverParachutes.com and read (or reread) my three part article "Practice, Practice, Practice" for the answer.

A COMMON PARACHUTE MYTH DEBUNKED

Many pilots think they have a ram-air (rectangular) parachute like the ones sky divers use. Chances are 99 percent or greater that you do not. The remaining 1 percent of pilots who have ram-air parachutes know they do because they have received the appropriate training in the use of their ram-air parachute. The rest of you have round parachutes that resemble an umbrella when open. So what's the difference? A ram-air parachute should be flared when landing because it is a non-rigid wing. All ram-air parachutes have steering handles, but not all round parachutes have them (although most do). Make sure you become familiar with what your parachute has or does not have in the

way of steering handles because this is how you guide your parachute to a safe landing area. The number one purpose of those steering handles is to steer clear of life-threatening obstacles (like roads that have power lines running alongside them). The second purpose of those handles is to face into the wind when landing. Unless you're in that 1 percent who have been trained on a ram-air parachute, **do not ever** pull both steering handles down at the same time on your **round** parachute. You've seen sky divers do it in the movies or at your local parachute center, but you'll significantly increase the rate of descent on a round parachute. Remember: Miss obstacles first, and then try to face into the wind to land (if you have time). It does you no good to face into the wind and land gently in the power lines.

Here is a simple rule-of-thumb to get a rough idea where you and your parachute are going to land. Most steerable parachutes have about a 5 mph forward speed that cannot be shut off. It's rare that you will be coming straight down (you would need a steady 5 mph head wind). If you notice the landscape moving

below you, then you are drifting somewhere. When you're drifting (either forward or backward) you will land somewhere between 45 and 60 degrees in front or in back of you (for reference, 90 degrees is straight down). If you don't like what's in that sight picture, steer to a safer landing area. If this is a bit confusing, your parachute rigger should be able to help you understand it. Another option is to schedule a bailout seminar for your flying group. I travel all over and would love to teach you and your group the proper techniques needed to make a safe bailout. I recently returned from Sun 'n Fun where I gave bailout seminars for the IAC. I'll be giving two presentations at Oshkosh. Maybe I'll see you there or somewhere in between. All it takes is a call to set up a seminar. Check my website for a seminar near you.

Keep the questions coming.

Allen Silver is the owner of Silver Parachute Sales and is always available to answer your questions about parachutes. Send your questions to Allen@silverparachutes.com.