



Ask Allen

A master rigger answers your questions about parachutes.

You know the old saying . . . "Pay me now or pay me later."

By Allen Silver, IAC 431160

Q: My parachute is showing signs of wear and abrasion near the rip cord protector flap. What can I do to prevent this and avoid a costly repair?

A: This is a common problem that I see often and have to repair. Every few weeks I get back-style parachutes in for inspection and recertification that require me to repair the rip cord protector flap that has been damaged by rubbing on the seat back. The same applies for seat packs that drop into the bucket seat of your Yak or Stearman. The cause is as easy to eliminate as the pack is to fix. The best idea is to fix the source of the problem before it needs the attention of a rigger. The culprit is most likely the seat. Any seat back or seat bottom that is made of a hard surface, whether it is smooth or rough, will create a lot of pressure (hot spots) on the material directly over the rip cord pins. In short order you will see an outline of the rip cord cable and pins showing through the material of your container. Now is the time to take corrective action.

The fix is easy and affordable. Simply cushion the area that receives the most pressure. The fix to the seat back, bottom, or both may be as simple as a thin piece of carpet remnant glued to your seat back or placed in the seat pan. Do not use a loose piece of foam unless it is covered because it will tear apart. Be creative, but do something.

You need to be proactive if you expect to get the maximum service life out of your parachute. Start before you ever place your parachute against a hard surface. Some aircraft come with cushioned seats, while other pilots have custom pads made. Some pilots have little room and want nothing behind them. They will pay the price down the road in the form of repairs. You know the old saying, "Pay me now or pay me later." In this case paying now is a better deal.

The cushion creates a barrier between the surface and your parachute. This greatly reduces the wear and tear to your container. Just as you would childproof your home to protect your family, you must do some work to protect your expensive cushion and keep it safe from damage.

Here's another hint: While you're busy padding your seat, look around for sharp or rough spots like welds or bolt or rivet heads that can also cause wear or snag your parachute harness or container. Of course, if your container is already damaged, have it repaired by a qualified rigger with the proper repair material and sewing machines. The cost is minimal and will add years to the life of your parachute.

Q: I've heard that I should check the rip cord pins when preflighting my parachute. How do I do this, and what am I looking for?

A: It's embarrassing to grab your parachute and hurriedly put it on only to have the spring-loaded pilot chute come flying out followed by some of your parachute. This can happen if one or more of the rip cord pins were to come free. The next time you take your parachute in for a repack, have your rigger show you where the pins are located and how to check them (if you ship your parachute, call and have the rigger explain it over the phone).

On some parachute containers it's rather difficult to open the rip cord protector flaps and inspect the pins, but you need to learn how to do this. Once you have figured out how to open the rip cord protector flap, here is what to look for. The pins should be in all the way up to the point where they start to flare and get bigger (see Figure 1). Just like the half-full or half-empty glass of water, decide if the pins are partially in or partially out. Then, *with your fingers only*, push them back in (see Figure 2). If the lead seal is broken and hanging loose, don't worry. It's more important to have the pins in properly. It can be resealed at the next repack. Do not shove the pins in so far that the flared part is up and over the lip of the grommet. This can create a much harder pull should you need to use your parachute in an emergency.

It should also go without saying that the rip cord pins should be

straight and not bent. If a pin is bent, you need to immediately have the rip cord replaced by your rigger. In some situations this can create a no-pull situation (see Figure 3). The pins usually get bent by pilots carelessly getting in to or out of their aircraft. When your parachute is stuck on the top of the turtledeck, don't just push harder or get a bigger shoehorn. Figure out the best way to enter and exit the cockpit. It could be as simple as having one less cheeseburger at the fast food place!

Please keep the questions coming, and don't forget to make your comments heard about going from a 120- to 180-day repack cycle. The deadline for comments ends on August 20, 2007. For information, go to my home page at www.SilverParachutes.com and click on the government link and follow the directions. It's important to do this if you want to see the repack cycle extended. The complete document that my son, Darrin, and I wrote is also on the FAA website and can be reached from my website. When filing your comments, remember that you must reference Docket Number FAA-2005-21829 in all of your correspondence.

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.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

Figure 1:
This pin has slid slightly out of place.

Figure 2:
Using only your fingers, push the pin back.

Figure 3:
Inspect the pin to be sure it is straight – a bent pin could restrict the pull in an emergency.

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