



A master rigger answers your questions about parachutes...and seat belts

Ask Allen

By Allen Silver

Q : How should I ship my parachute when it's due for a repack?

A : First, let's go over how *not* to ship your parachute! I have had parachutes arrive at my door in nothing more than the nylon carry bag, while others come in bombproof containers with special opening instructions that would confuse a Rubik's Cube expert.

Some parachutes arrive in well-traveled suitcases. Some come packed in Styrofoam chips that cling to everything. Others have been diligently packed in a box with what seems like a pound of tape sealing the top and no tape at all on the bottom of the box. In one instance, my UPS driver handed me a parachute that was in no box at all! Fortunately, there are few parachute riggers in this part of the world, so the UPS driver was able to figure it out.

Now, here is the proper way to do it. Find a shipping box that will fit your parachute snugly. Some riggers will even give you one! Remember, just like shipping a gift to a loved one, if the box is not filled out, it could get crushed when it is on the bottom of the pile in the shipping warehouse. Use paper or bubble wrap to fill up any void, but do not use Styrofoam chips. Besides sticking to everything and being an absolute pain to clean up, they can get lodged in the ripcord cable housing and make it difficult or impossible for you to pull the ripcord. This goes for wood shavings also. And, please do not use your daily newspaper for packing material. While I enjoy getting caught up with neighborhood gossip from across



Photo courtesy of Allen Silver

Correctly packing your parachute for shipping protects your investment.

the country, the ink can rub off onto your parachute.

If you insist on cushioning your parachute for its journey to the rigger, then use bubble wrap or special paper used for packaging. Your parachute will arrive intact if it is in a proper box. Remember to ship your parachute in its carry bag (if you do not have a carry bag, use a plastic garbage bag) just in case the box gets wet or contaminated in some manner. Many of my customers slip the carry case inside a garbage bag just to be safe.

Since we are talking about shipping your parachute for a repack anyway, let me make a suggestion. Practice pulling that ripcord. In the off chance you need it for real someday, it would

be good to know how it feels to actually pull the handle. Just don't forget to include all the parts that come flying out including the ripcord and any closing loops. You may also wonder what to do with the now-three-foot-long spring-loaded pilot chute that popped out halfway across the room. Just compress it into some plastic bags from the supermarket and tie or tape it shut. Make sure no tape gets on the nylon material. The adhesive will weaken nylon over a short period of time. This is also a great time to remove any sheepskin or sweat pads for cleaning if your parachute is equipped with them.

Finally, remember to put your contact info on a tag tied to the parachute in case all of the above fails.

Q : How often should I replace my seat belts in my aircraft?

A : That's an easy one...every time they break! Just kidding! Surprisingly, there are no regulations for the service life of seat belts. But that is no excuse for a lack of common sense. Like your parachute, proper maintenance is essential to safety. If you are not hard on the belts, you should be able to get five years out of them before they need to be replaced. When the webbing becomes really stiff and hard to adjust through the friction adaptors, or if the material is faded from extensive UV exposure, then it is time to spring for a new set. This means a whole new set, not just re-webbing the existing set using the old hardware. Over time, the knurled bars on the friction

adaptors become worn smooth and the webbing will slip. Did you know that the hardware is the weakest link in the belts? The last thing you need is a pretty set of belts with brand new webbing, and the metal hardware fails from fatigue.

Thank you for your questions, and keep them coming. And by the way, if you do send me Styrofoam

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peanuts, expect a double batch to be sent back to you. That's my way of returning the favor. Happy vacuuming! ✈

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.

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