



Winter practices

Surviving the cold

As the winter months are approaching, some of you will head south for warmer climates. Others are stuck at home and will consider other alternatives like skiing, and many of you will brave the winter weather and fly anyway. After all, skiing is fast and too close to the ground. You could find yourself hitting a tree at low altitude.

Having said that, winter flying requires some special precautions. You'll be donning protective clothing to keep out the cold. Before you fly off into the wild and cold blue yonder, I hope you will practice to make sure you can operate your aircraft safely with those thick gloves on. Will you be able to quickly open and jettison your door or canopy in an emergency? Some of you will say you've been flying for years and have had no problem in cold-weather. I'm not talking about normal cold weather flying followed by a warm cup of coffee.

Have you seriously considered having to bail out with your winter clothing on? You may have practiced operating your aircraft's emergency releases and experienced no problem releasing them. But, have you thought about being able to find the ripcord handle? Let's consider you've successfully bailed out and the ripcord is right where it's suppose to be, only to discover you can't take a hold of it and pull the ripcord because your gloves are too bulky and restrictive. There has been more than one skydiver who has found this out the very hard way. That's why each year mention is made, usually in *Parachutist* magazine, that you must properly winterize your jumping apparel, especially gloves. The United States Parachute Association recommends that gloves be worn below 40 degrees Fahrenheit or about 5 Celsius. Gloves can keep your hands warm and cozy, but they can also make it impossible or very difficult to exit your aircraft quickly, let alone pull the ripcord handle.

I recommend that you practice over and over until you feel comfortable and are sure you'll be able to respond rapidly, if an emergency exit becomes necessary. Luck and carrying a rabbit's foot while flying is not a good option. There has been more than one fatal-

ity that one of the contributing factors was the inability to pull the ripcord with gloves on. In addition to a tight fit they may be securely fastened to your wrists with something like Velcro, preventing quick removal. I know someone out there will say just take a hold of the Velcro in your teeth and pull. This might work, but when you bailed out, your glasses either blew off or fogged up and you couldn't see clearly due to the wind. Did I mention you bailed out lower than you intended because you had trouble releasing the door or canopy with your gloves on? You could try and remove them before you exit your aircraft, but the loss of time and altitude could prove fatal. Think about it. Be proactive and be prepared. Do something before your next cold-weather flight to insure you'll be around to enjoy that warm cup of coffee.

If you plan on storing your parachute for the winter, please treat it kindly and keep it in a cool/warm, dry place out of direct sunlight. I suggest you also place it in a plastic container with a snap-on lid to help further protect it from all kinds of critters and moisture. If you plan on storing it for over six months, I further suggest you pull the ripcord and remove all the rubber bands. Be careful that the lines and canopy material do not come in contact with the scratchy part of Velcro tape that can damage them.

Rubber bands will deteriorate over time and they sometimes become very sticky. I recently received a parachute that hadn't been packed in a very long time and was improperly stored in a hot, humid climate. The rubber bands were stuck to the grommets on the deployment diaper and to a couple of the suspension lines. At the very least this would have slowed the opening. It could have also prevented the parachute from opening.

Fortunately I was able to replace the grommets and successfully remove the very small amount of rubber band that had stuck to the lines of the parachute. Rubber bands can sometimes become sticky enough to essentially glue the lines of your parachute



together. In most cases this will permanently ground your parachute. This would have become a very expensive lesson.

I personally have never found a safe chemical or a way to remove the sticky rubber bands from the lines without damaging them. In the above case I mentioned only a very small piece of rubber band was stuck to a line or two and the owner was lucky that I was able to remove it. Preventive maintenance starts with you. "Remember, only you can prevent . . ." Oops that's forest fires, but you get the picture.

For further information about this problem, you can go to my website. Once there click on the link to "Ask Allen" on the left and then click on my December 2008 column. It explains in more detail what I'm talking about. I've attached a photo from that article showing what rubber bands can do. They're an integral part of your parachute's deployment system and require special care.

The holiday season is upon us and I want to thank each and every one of you who read my column, have given me suggestions and advice for future columns, or have invited me to give your group a bailout seminar. I would also like to thank *Sport Aerobatics* and especially the editor, Reggie Paulk, for printing my column. **I wish you and your families a very Happy Holiday Season and New Year.**

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