

URGENT CALL TO ACTION!

Since late February, there have been five fatalities (and one critical injury) that were canopy-collision related. Every skydiver is asking the same questions: "How is this happening, and why?" It appears that skill level and proficiency are not indicators. One accident involved two jumpers with about 23 jumps each who were the only two jumpers under canopy at the time. Another accident involved a jumper with 17,000 jumps and another with 8,000 jumps, both very proficient and with very little other traffic around them.

It is time that we all accept the responsibility of ending the canopy-collision threat.

We are asking all skydivers to join in this CALL TO ACTION. Individual jumpers must follow the guidelines in the Skydiver's Information Manual that have proven to keep our skies safer when they are applied correctly. Additionally, we are asking that all S&TAs observe and correct poor habits at their DZs. We are asking that DZOs become more involved in canopy safety by establishing canopy flight rules, and safe landing patterns and landing areas. This type of accident **MUST STOP**, and we all can be a part of making that happen.

Jay Stokes, USPA President

SKYDIVER ACTION CALL

The time has come for us to change the way we are looking at ourselves and those around us and to insist upon a different set of outcomes. We have lost nearly 30 fellow skydivers in recent years to situations in which two canopy pilots ran into each other. Some of these accidents are attributable to jumpers executing "induced-speed" (or high-performance) landings, and others are not. There have been many different circumstances surrounding these incidents, leading to many theories about the causes and steps that can be taken to prevent additional instances. In recent months, USPA Board members and staff have had in-depth dialogue with many skydiving experts and skydivers who care. USPA is committed to canopy education and will continue working on those recommendations. Meanwhile, here are some generally agreed-upon observations, followed by suggestions, some of which can be applied by every one of us.

- Skydivers have become increasingly concerned about their personal safety. Many jumpers are experiencing a substantially increased fear of being unexpectedly, and perhaps fatally, involved in a canopy collision—being struck from behind or above by a more aggressive canopy pilot. Some have publically expressed a lack of desire to jump at drop zones that do not promote a safe canopy flying culture. It is no longer "politically incorrect" to be an advocate of good canopy-flying behavior.
- When skydivers are trained in canopy-flight techniques and (perhaps more importantly) in canopy-flight decision-making, they become better and safer canopy pilots. They make better decisions and are significantly more aware of their surroundings under canopy. Industry experts agree that improving canopy education is critical, but we also know that it takes time.

- Higher wing loadings increase risk. Canopy pilots that fly at higher wing loadings are not necessarily unsafe, but statistics bear out a higher level of threat to the highly loaded canopy pilot and those who fly in his or her vicinity. Highly loaded canopies fly more quickly and react much more radically to toggle and riser input than lightly loaded parachutes. Skydivers who fly high-performance parachutes must maintain a great deal of respect for the flight characteristics of those parachutes.
- Mixing of standard landing patterns and high-performance landing patterns is dangerous. True separation of landing areas by distance and/or time is crucial. This includes not only the final approach and touchdown zones, but also the airspace above the drop zone where high-performance and standard-pattern flyers may intermix during pattern and/or landing maneuver set-up. Simply put, we can't just paint a line down the middle of the landing area and think that it will provide adequate separation. The total three-dimensional aspect of the airspace and any potential conflicts must be thoroughly considered in the landing zone layout.
- Predictability is the key to safe landing patterns and accident avoidance. Excessive turns in the traffic pattern are exponentially more dangerous than straight-in final approaches following a 90-degree turn from base to final leg. This is true of jumpers busting out big turns to final (180s, 270s, 720s, etc.), as well as the old-school jumper doing S-turns or a braked accuracy descent down the middle of his final approach path. Both can become rapidly unpredictable and result in unexpected outcomes like low-altitude collision-avoidance turns and worse.
- Many jumpers don't pay attention to their surroundings as much as they should while flying their canopies. Everyone needs to pay attention to their environment and look out for everyone else.
- In some cases, the only way to educate is to enforce rules and provide consequences for bad behavior—especially repeated bad behavior.

Here are a couple of ideas that we can implement today. USPA is asking all members to take action to address this situation. There is something that you can do, regardless of your status on the drop zone.

Each skydiver should:

- ✓ Recognize the need to get more training, gain more knowledge and improve your canopy skills. Start now by reviewing Sections [6-10](#) and [6-11](#) in the Skydiver's Information Manual.
- ✓ In air, improve your visual scan and awareness of where others are in the sky. Look not only where you want to fly, but look for where others may be. On final approach, maintain your scan and awareness of others; don't get tunnel vision on your landing spot.
- ✓ Realize that every turn increases the chance for converging flight. When descending into the standard landing area, fly a standard pattern and continue to scan the airspace for any conflicting canopy traffic while keeping your turns to no more than 90 degrees.

- ✓ Set an example through your behavior. Become a proponent of safe canopy flight. Walk the talk, fly the pattern, and share the knowledge.
- ✓ Demand a safe canopy flight environment at your home drop zone. Talk to your DZO, S&TAs and fellow jumpers about it. Insist upon a culture of safe canopy flight.

Each DZO and S&TA should:

- ✓ Establish DZ canopy-flight rules and be certain that they are clearly communicated to all jumpers.
- ✓ Establish and utilize a method for determining and communicating landing direction on each load.
- ✓ Truly separate high-performance and standard landing areas. Consider the approach portion of the airspace and be certain that the opportunity for overlap in differing wind conditions and jump runs is minimized.
- ✓ Be certain the rules for each landing area are well established. Limit turns in the standard landing pattern to 90 degrees. Let your jumpers know that radical diving and speed-inducing maneuvers, as well as S-turns and braked accuracy approaches to the standard landing pattern will not be tolerated.
- ✓ Consider other restrictions on your high-performance landing area, and be sure that everyone knows about it.
- ✓ Consider instituting a “Canopy Safety Monitor” or “Landing Safety Officer” approach, where an experienced staff member is empowered to observe and evaluate canopy flight from the ground in order to provide immediate feedback to errant canopy pilots. This "monitor" could be an S&TA, Instructor or simply a trusted and empowered jumper. This allows the DZ to monitor and address potentially dangerous situations in real time.
- ✓ Step up your use of counseling and enforcement tools to address irresponsible canopy piloting. Your USPA Regional Director will be happy to assist with this process if it is desired.