

News Release

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Parachutes to get longer repack cycle

Washington, DC, Nov. 19, 2008

Skydivers and pilots who use parachutes will get an extra 60 days between mandatory repacks of their parachutes, under a revised regulation published today by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

The revision extends from 120 to 180 days the period between required inspection and repacking by a certificated parachute rigger. It takes effect Dec. 19, 30 days from today's publication in the Federal Register.

The rule applies to reserve parachutes worn by all skydivers and smoke jumpers as well as emergency parachutes worn by pilots of aerobatic airplanes and gliders, air crew members, and the growing number of military special ops jumpers using commercial "off the shelf" parachute equipment.

The rule change was praised by the two organizations which had jointly sought it for nearly four years, the Parachute Industry Association (PIA) and the United States Parachute Association (USPA).

PIA President Cliff Schmucker noted, "The 180-day repack rule change is a fine example of what PIA and USPA can accomplish working as one. Together we will endeavor to continue improving safety for parachute users."

"This result shows what can happen when two organizations like USPA and PIA decide to work together on common goals," said USPA Executive Director Ed Scott. "We look forward to doing even more together for the benefit of skydivers."

USPA first petitioned the FAA for an exemption in 1998, but its initiative was rejected in 2001 for what the FAA found was lack of full industry support.

Allen Silver, chair of the PIA's Rigging Committee, reignited discussion with the FAA in early 2005 and USPA joined to form a task group which submitted a joint petition to the FAA. Other organizations whose members use parachutes also joined the effort, including the Aircraft Owners and Pilot Assn., the Experimental Aircraft Assn. and the Soaring Society of America.

Initially, the group sought an exemption from the 120-day rule, but the FAA determined that an exemption would be too broad and a rule change was more appropriate. It published its proposal for change in May, 2007.

The FAA said in approving the change that it had received 338 comments about it during the four-month comment period; only eight commenters explicitly opposed the new rule.

In justifying the extension, the FAA cited "new reliability data from the parachute industry and other sources" which indicated that modern materials and construction techniques made it safe to allow parachutes to remain packed for a longer period.

"Recently acquired data from the U.S. military, foreign aviation authorities, and parachute industry representatives suggest that the current 120-day packing interval is too short," the FAA said.

"Numerous experts asserted that modern parachute materials last longer when the packing interval is longer than 120 days and that too-frequent packing shortens the life of the materials. Those experts found the parachutes' porosity was affected by handling and manipulation of the parachute while being packed."

The longer repack cycle is consistent with U.S. military parachute regulations, as well as with regulations in many foreign countries. The FAA noted that it has for some time allowed many foreign skydivers visiting the U.S. to use reserve parachutes that comply with their countries' regulations, "and many of those foreign parachutists' countries had much longer repack intervals." No accident or incident reports over the past seven years had implicated material failures in those parachutes, the FAA said.

The FAA last addressed the repack cycle in 1978, when it increased the repack period from 60 to 120 days. In making that change, the FAA noted that modern parachutes were constructed of synthetic materials far less subject to degradation than parachutes made of silk, cotton, and other natural fabrics.

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About PIA

The Parachute Industry Association, based in Skokie, IL, is an international association of companies, organizations, U.S. Department of Defense and government agencies, and individuals engaged in the design, manufacture, sale, maintenance and use of parachutes in military and sport parachuting and aircraft safety. It is regarded as the authority on parachute materials specifications and parachute certification standards and procedures.

About USPA

The United States Parachute Association, based in Fredericksburg, VA, is America's premier organization dedicated to the promotion of safe skydiving nationwide, establishing strict safety standards, training policies and programs at more than 220 affiliated skydiving schools/centers. The Federal Aviation Administration recognizes and supports USPA's successful leadership role in the self-regulation of skydiving.