If You're in the Circuit, **Speak Up!**

Airways is on a quest to improve runway and circuit safety by getting air traffic controllers and pilots speaking to each other – properly.

Controllers want pilots to actually report as they cross reporting points, respond unambiguously to directions, let ATC know if they lose sight of the preceding aircraft in the circuit, or if an instruction confuses them, or if they get lost because the aerodrome is unfamiliar.

The message is: "Speak up!"

"Some runway occurrences in the last few years have been quite nasty," says Northern Towers (Hamilton, Rotorua, Napier, Gisborne) Manager, Michele Dumble.

"Things like aircraft cutting off those preceding them in the circuit. The pilots have lost sight of those ahead, not said anything to ATC, assumed they were next to land and have just gone for it."

Chief flying instructors at a CAA seminar in Wellington in October 2014, were told by Airways standards specialist, Pete Roberts, that pilots who've lost visual contact with preceding traffic need to let controllers know.

"They also need to make sure the downwind call is made and that they don't turn base if the position of the traffic they are following is not known. Extending downwind and advising controllers would take a whole lot of heat off ATC!"

Michele Dumble, who is one of the prime movers behind the push to get ATC and pilots communicating more effectively, says air traffic controllers will soon be getting their own runway and circuit operations safety message.

"We've prepared a video of Pete's presentation and that will be delivered to chief controllers during 2015.

"ATC need to give *clear* instructions, and in a timely manner that allows pilots – particularly inexperienced pilots – plenty of time to respond. Controllers also need to be proactive in dealing with a developing situation, and not just 'monitor' it."

Pete Roberts agrees, saying that events sometimes occur because controllers have not 'painted the picture' for pilots as fully as they should have.

"Some pilots, for whatever reason, may not receive a sequence report prior to hitting the traffic circuit, but they still just barrel on in. They must insist on receiving a sequence."

He also says that at critical times controllers have to eliminate distractions, such as routine aerodrome tasks, and focus on the "right thing at the right time".

"Runway and circuit operations safety is a combination of ATC and pilots carrying out their joint responsibilities to the absolute best of their pooled abilities."

Michele thinks some problems arise from the fact that, while training organisations *are* delivering runway and circuit safety messages, their coverage is cursory, with students regurgitating them for exams and forgetting them in practice.

"I think pilots believe controllers will do more to separate aircraft than is currently their role, so the pilots are not carrying out their obligations of 'see and be seen', sequencing, and spacing."

Chief Controller at Palmerston North, Bill Penman, says some of the things he has witnessed are "enough to make your eyes water". He agrees that good runway practice is probably not reinforced enough during training.

"They maybe get the syllabus, go through it, tick it off and it's done, but there isn't enough emphasis on what the pilot's responsibility for runway safety actually is."

Bill says one of the most innovative and simplest ways he has seen instructors teach circuit practice is chalking a runway on the flying school tarmac.

"The students are walking the circuit as aircraft, and the instructor is the controller. It's really effective!"

Michele Dumble says a big push at present is professional RT. She and Bill Penman agree there is an increasing number of read-back issues.

"They're becoming short-cut, and sometimes people don't hear them or request them. Sometimes when clearances are given and they are not read back, or are read back incorrectly, the controller does not pick up on that."

Deputy Chief Flight Instructor with Massey's School of Aviation, Paul Kearney, says he's not personally aware of a rise in the number of runway safety events although he admits he can speak only for his own area.

But he agrees about sloppy RT, saying he's noticed an increase in the inappropriate use, by pilots with a few hours behind them, of the word "copy".

"If ATC says something like 'follow Charlie-Bravo-Zulu, number two', instead of the pilot responding with something coherent, they imitate airline pilots and say 'copy traffic'.

"What does that mean? They understand and are looking out for the aircraft ahead? They have seen and are following that aircraft? They understand the instruction but cannot see the preceding aircraft?

"And ATC are not taking them up on that confusing response. Many controllers assume such a communication means 'have aircraft in sight and am following' and they relax. But that may not be the case at all."

Paul says from the pilot's viewpoint, when things get busy, ATC uses what he calls tight and regulated "proceduralised" language.

"That makes students quite reluctant to engage with ATC, because they are anxious they don't have the right lingo.

"I teach my students a line to use so they feel less foolish if they are confused about an instruction," he says. "It's *I understand you want me to do such and such…* And ATC will correct them if they are wrong.

"I also tell them if they need to talk to ATC and they can't remember the correct phraseology, just hit the button and talk in plain language.

"ATC would rather hear from them like that, than not at all because they're embarrassed they can't remember the standard phraseology."

Bill Penman says one of the best things pilots can do is bone up on Advisory Circular AC172-2 *Air Traffic Services – Aerodrome Air Traffic Control,* available on the CAA web site.

"It's good commonsense stuff and will help pilots better understand their own role, by better understanding the role of ATC."

Bill believes some pilots might be put off when, for instance, they ask for clearance, and ATC may respond sounding a bit officious.

"That's just because we've got busy and don't have time to chat. We tend to sound fairly sharp and to the point and we're using standard phraseology that doesn't have a lot of feeling in it.

"But we do encourage pilots to come to the tower and say gidday. If we're not busy, we're always on for a chat."

Paul Kearney agrees. "It's one of the best things I do with my students – introduce them to the controllers. And anyone on a cross country should land and head to the tower.

"You should always get a friendly reception and it's good for the controllers to realise there are human beings at the other end of the radio, and vice versa."

Trends for Runway Safety Events
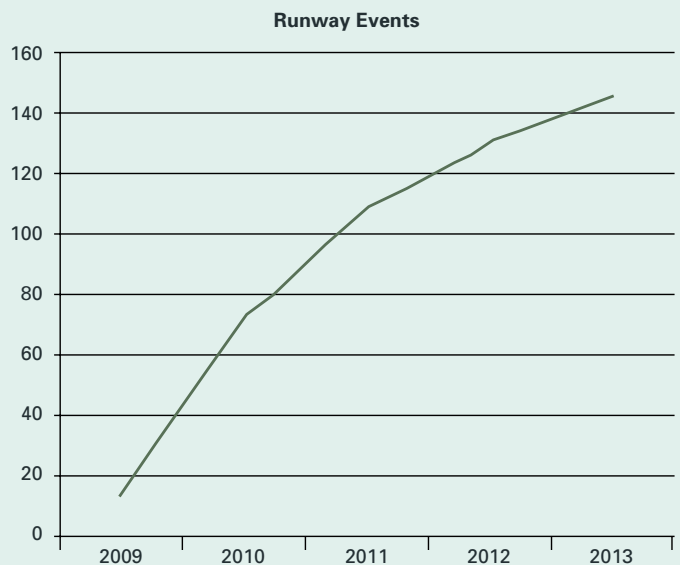
Runway Events

Airways is concerned about the steady increase in runway safety events since 2009, some of which have been triggered by poor communication between ATCs and pilots.

Further Reading

Learn how to be a more effective RT practitioner by taking the CAA online course *Plane Talking*, www.caa.govt.nz/avkiwi.

The GAP booklet *Plane Talking* can be downloaded from the CAA web site, www.caa.govt.nz, or for printed copies, email: info@caa.govt.nz.

Advisory Circulars on the CAA web site:

AC91-9 *Radiotelephony Manual*

AC172-2 *Air Traffic Services – Aerodrome Air Traffic Control* ∎