



// Calls should be clear, concise, consistent and correct.

Photo: iStockphoto.com/southerlycourse

PLANE TALKING AND SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

Good radio comms makes your life, and the lives of the pilots around you easier, and *safer*.

CAA Safety Investigator Peter Stevenson-Wright has heard numerous examples of unprofessional radio calls in his 20 years on the job.

“Whereas well-constructed and clearly spoken radio calls are gold to other aircraft,” he says.

“Good comms and accurate position reports are crucial, so other pilots can accurately place your aircraft into their mental ‘traffic’ picture.

“That includes using the geographical points on the VNC, not places only known to locals. Think of the itinerant pilot.”

CAA Flight Examiner Marc Brogan says the sheer volume of calls sometimes made, and their length, can confuse other pilots and make it difficult for *them* to make appropriate transmissions.

“Keep calls short and sharp,” he advises, “and relevant to what you’re doing.

“For instance, you don’t need to make a call at every leg of the circuit. Make the downwind call, and any others only to ensure aircraft requiring your position are kept aware.”

CAA Aeronautical Services Officer Robert Shanks says standard phraseology ensures instructions and

information are passed in a clear and concise manner, every time, so there's no ambiguity in communication.

"An ATC frequency can quickly become jammed up if a pilot is using non-standard, long-winded transmissions.

"Air traffic controllers might have to make extra radio calls to pilots to confirm information, or to ensure the pilot has read back and understood critical components of the ATC clearance.

"And an overloaded frequency reduces the controller's ability to maintain control, or pass essential information quickly to all pilots on that frequency."

Even so, Marc Brogan says, if a pilot isn't sure of the standard phraseology, they should make the call anyway, using plain language.

"Better that, than no communication at all."

CAA helicopter Flight Examiner Andy McKay agrees calls should be clear, concise, and relevant.

"And rotary pilots should follow the same radio protocol as fixed wing pilots – they share the same airspace after all.

"But a helicopter pilot should be further mindful of having particularly good communication equipment – headset, radio, and audio panel.

"That's because helicopters have a greater risk of background noise, particularly wind noise when their doors are removed for utility operations."

"Obviously that makes hearing transmissions difficult. Quality equipment reduces the risk associated with that," Andy says.

Outside the circuit, Marc Brogan calls the constant radio use of some pilots to 'overtell' other aircraft their position, intention and so on, a "false security blanket."

// ...calls can be inaccurate, they can be vague, and they can be misunderstood. //

"They have a sense of, 'well I've told everyone where I am, so I'm safe now.' And then it's heads down in the cockpit.

"But calls can be inaccurate, they can be vague, and they can be misunderstood.

"I've even known pilots to be so reliant on radio, that, if what they 'heard' transmitted differs from what they're looking at, they'll deny what they're seeing – like the position of another aircraft.

"But radio is absolutely not the 'be all and end all'. It's an aid to situational awareness, to communicate what you're doing, and to receive instruction when needed.

"But it should never replace the eyeball." ➤

// UPDATED BOOKLETS

The new release of *Plane talking* incorporates fresh guidance laid out in Advisory Circular AC91-9 & 172-1 *Radiotelephony Manual*.

Milford aerodrome and its surrounds present special challenges to pilots. The new *In, Out and Around Milford* provides a starting point for preflight considerations, including advice about weather and traffic.

To get free copies of either booklet, or any in the GAP range, email info@caa.govt.nz.

