

CLOSE TO THE EDGE

From the beginning of 2019 to the end of 2021, there were 904 reported airspace busts in New Zealand – that’s almost one a day. All but 13 were into controlled airspace.

The CAA receives reports of airspace busts on a weekly basis.

“It could be an aircraft that inadvertently enters controlled airspace,” says Deputy Chief Executive for Aviation Safety David Harrison. “Or it’ll be an aircraft that doesn’t make a radio call and goes straight through a mandatory broadcast zone, or an aircraft that’s 1000 feet higher than what it was cleared for.”

About half of the airspace busts are made by solo training flights, but the other half are made by general aviation flights – both recreational and commercial.

David is now encouraging GA and student pilots to “fly consciously” well away from uncontrolled/controlled airspace boundaries.

The issue has been thrown into focus by the work the CAA has been doing with Queenstown airport users on the new Air New Zealand ATR procedures.

The new procedures have a higher navigation accuracy, but because of that, David says, the ATRs get quite close to the boundary of controlled airspace and the general aviation area.

“It’s not just about Queenstown, however,” says David. “The statistics indicate this is an issue throughout New Zealand.”

Latest figures indicate the two aerodromes most frequently subject to airspace busts are Christchurch and Hamilton.

“It’s also not just about the boundary between controlled and uncontrolled airspace, or between smaller fixed-wing recreational aircraft and passenger transport aircraft,” says David.

“It’s also about the boundaries between general aviation areas, restricted, and danger areas.

“It’s your responsibility to give yourself a buffer if you’re flying close to an airspace boundary. »

Photo courtesy of Queenstown Airport.



1 "Unauthorised altitude penetration"

// New Air New Zealand ATR procedures at Queenstown have a higher navigation accuracy, and get quite close to the boundary of controlled airspace and the general aviation area.

» “Otherwise, you could be quite close to traffic in controlled airspace without actually realising it.”

David says some of the problem is exacerbated by pilots’ increasing trust in technology.

“There’s such a huge reliance on, say, moving maps and GPS in the aircraft, that it encourages pilots to fly closer to the edge of airspace than they would without those devices.

“That’s all well and good, but – particularly as a VFR pilot – you’re meant to be looking out the window. You should know your position in relation to airspace boundaries and the actual ground you’re over.”

David says there’s also the risk that airspace data on a moving map might be out-of-date.

“A lot of airspace is designed off prominent visual features, like roads or big factories – things a pilot can easily identify.

“So regardless of having a moving map, you should be looking outside because that’s a really good way of keeping a certain distance away from boundary trouble.”

David says that, while flying close to the uncontrolled/controlled airspace boundary is permissible, the danger is the aircraft unwittingly wandering across that boundary.

He likens it to the centreline of a road.

“It’s permissible to drive just to the left of that white line, but most people would think that was a pretty dangerous thing to do, because it’s easy to dawdle over it, and if an approaching car is doing the same thing...”

David says proper preflight planning is essential.

“Pilots should know where they’re going to fly and think about all the airspace considerations *before* their flight – identify those prominent features that will help you stay clear of the airspace boundaries.”

The statistics indicate most airspace busts happen during the cruise – about four times as many as during the climb.

“The cruise is where pilots tend to relax a bit,” says David. “But stay ahead of the aircraft, know where you are, and always be anticipating what you have to do next.

“Otherwise, you lose situational awareness, and end up with little idea of where you are – including near busy controlled aerodromes.” 

Comments or queries?

Email david.harrison@caa.govt.nz

DANGEROUS GOODS AC HAVE YOUR SAY

The CAA is in the middle of a massive project to make the carriage of dangerous goods easier to understand.

The revamped Advisory Circular AC92-2 (*Carriage of dangerous goods on domestic VFR flights in unpressurised aircraft not exceeding 5700 MCTOW*) will soon be out for public consultation.

Go to aviation.govt.nz/subscribe and sign up to ‘Part 92’ to be notified when the advisory circular is ready for comment.

The AC includes guidance on rule 92.11 *Exceptions* (that’s carriage of DG by police, carriage of class 1

Dangerous Goods

KEEP YOURSELF SAFE. ASK YOUR AIRLINE.



Items like these can be dangerous in the air. They might be banned and taken off you before you board. Some items might be allowed if packed correctly. Avoid prosecution. **Ask your airline for advice.**



For more information, visit www.caa.govt.nz/dg



