

Airspace Safety and RA(T)s

It is the duty of every pilot to respect airspace restrictions.

This briefing note focuses on RA(T)s and their significance

VARIOUS forms of airspace influence where and how we fly. These are either permanent in nature, in which case they are usually marked on our maps; or, they might be temporary, in which case they are communicated through NOTAMs.

Permanent or temporary, it is the duty of each and every pilot to know which airspace considerations are likely to affect their flight and to take the necessary steps to respect those restrictions and remain within the law.

Many glider pilots fly tasks that have been set for them either within competitions or by formal/informal club task setters. Whilst the ultimate responsibility for dealing with airspace in flight rests with the pilot, clubs and competitions organisers also bear some of the responsibility as well.

Airspace information is freely available and so there are no excuses for non-compliance with the rules. Let's focus on one particular type of airspace notification – Restricted Airspace (Temporary) RA(T)s.

The provisions pertaining to RA(T)s are very clear:

- A RA(T) is an absolutely prohibited area of airspace during the notified period of activation.
- RA(T)s are always established for Red Arrows' displays. The Red Arrows publish their display programme on their website some months in advance and every display is identified in NOTAMs and via the AIS Freephone service.

Unfortunately, it is shamefully clear that not all pilots are aware of RA(T)s and their significance. There have been several reported RA(T) infringements over time. A variety of aircraft types, including gliders, have been implicated. You are probably aware of the

cancellation of a Red Arrows display last summer and the associated mass infringement of the RA(T) by gliders flying in a competition.

So, what have we learnt from such infringements?

Not all pilots are as aware as they should be of airspace rules and regulations. Inexcusable. If you fall into that category then get "refreshed" – there are plenty of materials out there to help you, and your CFI should be able to point you in the right direction if you don't know where to start. If they don't...your club has a bigger potential problem.

Competition organisers have a particular duty of care towards competition pilots. Competitions set tasks that pilots then go and fly. The competition environment is such that pilots are often under time pressure to do their pre-flight planning. This can give rise to the sort of conditions where things are either over-looked or not properly analysed and taken into account.

So, to minimise the risk of a RA(T) infringement:

- It is necessary for task setting to be done so that it takes full account of all airspace restrictions in and around the proposed task area and that the necessary checks have been made against the latest NOTAMs.
- Tasks should be set, ideally, either away from, or with as much margin from, any areas of restricted/prohibited airspace.
- Task setters must be fully aware of any RA(T) that may be in the task area and set legs that will pass a reasonable distance from the edge of any RA(T) during the period of activation. Additionally, the risk of inadvertent infringement is clearly increased if groups of aircraft plan to pass close to a RA(T).
- Competition organisers should also be fully

aware of exactly what restrictions must be briefed to the pilots and, in particular, of any RA(T)s that will be active and prohibited while the gliders are airborne.

- An appropriate amount of time for pre-flight planning should be allowed for.
- Whether organising a competition, setting a club task for a group, planning a solo cross-country or just flying in the local area, planning to avoid RA(T)s is extremely important.

A small amount of common sense can go a long way in avoiding RA(T) infringements.

When a RA(T) is close to a club that may be launching significant numbers of gliders, it is recommended that:

- Gliders must either not launch during the notified time of the RA(T) or it must be guaranteed that gliders will have been launched and have departed on their task well away from the area before the notified time of activation.
- If possible, liaison should be established with the site that has the RA(T) so that clubs can make them aware of any particularly high

levels of glider traffic in their vicinity.

Remember, whilst we are more than happy to be in the presence of several/many other gliders, it can often cause others great concern – a controller who may not be in contact with the passing group of aircraft, but who is in contact with the RA(T) aircraft, will be uncertain whether or not the group of aircraft are likely to change course and perhaps infringe the RA(T).

Glider pilots are not alone in sometimes making mistakes and infringing RA(T)s. Other aircraft types are also responsible for these and other types of airspace infringements. Nevertheless, we can and should take it upon ourselves to make sure that we do our best to be the best.

Further information is available at:

- www.ais.org.uk
- The AIS information line 0500 354802
- www.raf.mod.uk/reds/displayinfo/displaydates.cfm

This article appears in the April/May 2011 issue of **S&G**



RA(T)s are always established for Red Arrows' displays (Paul Johnson)

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