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YOUR INSURANCE IN THE SKY

Newsletter

Flying in winter: read our tips!

Winter is upon us. It's the perfect time to review how the weather conditions at the coldest time of year impact general aviation. Jan Thiers, aviation safety specialist and claims surveyor for Aviabel, offers concrete tips in case you plan on manning the cockpit of an aircraft yourself.

Watch out for icing

"Icing is definitely the main problem during the winter period", explains **Jan Thiers**. "Icing occurs in many different ways: a frozen airstrip, black ice or slush on the runway or landing strip, ice formation on the wings and propeller during flight, ... Moreover, it's crucial for the plane to be completely de-iced before the start."

Beware of ground fog

Particularly in the late autumn and spring, ground fog may arise very rapidly. That can make it considerably more difficult for the pilot to approach the airport. "That's why I advise pilots to be sure to stay on schedule, so that they won't be surprised by ground fog. Also, the fact that the days are shorter in winter should encourage pilots to carefully plan their flights."

Avoid condensation in fuel tanks

Condensation in fuel tanks can happen at any time of year, but the problem is more acute in winter. Even when an aircraft is stored in a hangar, there is a fair chance that condensation will form. You can only prevent this by filling the fuel tanks as full as possible and giving them a good draining before starting.

Be prepared for emergencies

If you're flying over a desolate area, take the necessary precautions in case something goes wrong. After all, it could take some time for you to be found after an emergency landing. Be sure to bring warm clothes, enough food and water, a fleece blanket, a flashlight, ... to withstand cold temperatures. And don't assume that this can only happen in very remote areas, it's possible even in the Belgian Ardennes.

Check the weather forecast regularly

"Check the weather conditions several days before your flight and continue to do so until just before departure. Don't let yourself be caught off guard. After all, things can go wrong very quickly. A few years ago, a pilot in Belgium was surprised by a sudden snowstorm. In such a situation, it's best to immediately look for a large airport nearby where you can receive help, but the pilot decided to try to go back and find the airport he had



started from. He was unsuccessful and crashed in a forest. Be prepared: see that your communication and navigation equipment is properly functioning and that you're familiar with how it works (test it in advance!), so that you can safely find your way out of the danger zone."

Beware of slush and frozen brakes

Slush (partially melted snow) often forms on the runway or landing strip. As such, it shouldn't be a problem, because the slush will be displaced when the aircraft lands. But there's a chance that the slush will accumulate around the wheels and brakes when an aeroplane is in the air, and will then freeze solid. This will cause the brakes to be disabled, which is, of course, a big problem when you're trying to land, because in this scenario, the landing strip will be extremely slippery.

It's not all bad news

"The winter period also has some positive effects for aviation", Jan Thiers points out: "The visibility is better, the air is clearer and cold air has a higher density than warm air. This means that the engine will perform better than in the summer and there is greater air density to support the wings. Flying just works better in winter."