

CAN YOU SURVIVE IN THE WATER?

I recently attended an aviation safety course that I think you should all know about -- because it could save your life.

It's called "Aircraft Ditching, Egress and Survival Training" and it was presented by Pro Aviation Safety Training (phone: 604-514-1630). The course provides instruction on surviving in water and escape techniques from aircraft that have ditched into water.

Why is this program important? According to a recent Transportation Safety Board (TSB) report, half of the occupants of ditched aircraft drowned while trapped in the cabin. Of those who managed to survive, only 8% got out without difficulty.

According to the Transport Canada Safety Letter, "underwater egress training is invaluable for any pilot who flies regularly over water, regardless of the type of aircraft flown". Since I think most of us fly over water at least occasionally, taking this training should be a given.

This course was very enjoyable and informative and has changed my outlook on how I will conduct future flights over water. The most important thing that I learned was how uninformed most of us are about this subject and how poorly prepared we are to face the possibility of water escape and survival.

First you have to escape ...

The first thing we learned was how to escape from our aircraft. Believe me, this is easier said than done, especially if the aircraft is rolling or upside down in water. In a real life situation, you probably can't see and are disoriented.

Underwater escape training can make the difference. The program uses an underwater egress trainer in the pool to simulate realistic circumstances. This is a proven system, used by both the military and civilian aviation industry to train personnel.

After experiencing this challenge in the relative safe confines of a pool, I feel that I am much more prepared to face the real thing than I was before.

... Then you have to survive

The second major hazard faced by Canadian aviators is staying alive after escaping from the aircraft. In Canada's coastal waters -- even in the most southerly points -- the average water temperature rarely exceeds 10 degrees Celsius even on the hottest summer days.

It is estimated that the average person will lose the use of their hands and forearms within 20 minutes in 10 degree water, and will lose consciousness within 60 minutes. Of course if the

water is colder there will be even less time. Since the average rescue time is 12 hours or longer, even with a personal floatation device you will not survive unless you have the proper cold-weather equipment.

Preparation Is The Key

If you are flying a floatplane, or are operating over water, ask yourself the question, "Am I really prepared if I have an emergency ditching into water?" If the answer is no, aviation safety training courses like this one can prepare you if this ever occurs and can help you evaluate the survival equipment you need to have on board.

Commit to do your part as a pilot to make Canadian general aviation the safest it can be.

Dave Fitzpatrick is a pilot, airplane owner and the Aviation Insurance Manager at Park Insurance in Vancouver. He offers a free aviation insurance review to any owners who contact him at (604)659-3150 or toll-free at 1-888-917-1177. Email: dfitzpatrick@park.ca