



Interagency Aviation Lessons Learned



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Subject: Operations at Non-Towered Airports

Area of Focus: Mid-Air Collision Avoidance

Distribution: All Aviation Operations

Discussion: Earlier this year, a Cessna 208 Caravan and a Bell 205A1++ were involved in a near mid-air event while departing from an airport in Alaska. Here's the story.

Passengers were boarding the Bell 205 as the Cessna 208 pilot started the aircraft and taxied from the ramp to the runway for departure.



The Bell 205 pilot started the helicopter once the passengers were on-board. After the start sequence was complete, the pilot noticed a caution light that indicated a door was not secure. The helicopter manager, who was sitting in the right front seat, got out of the aircraft to check the doors. He discovered that the tail boom door was the culprit. He then secured the door, which took care of the issue.

The Bell 205 pilot stated that he heard the C-208 pilot say something on the Common Traffic Advisory Frequency (CTAF) while he was troubleshooting the caution light and assumed the C-208 had departed.

With the helicopter manager back in the aircraft, the Bell 205 pilot lifted the helicopter into a hover and turned to the south. As the aircraft began moving forward, the pilot made a radio call on CTAF stating that he was departing to the south. The pilot departed the ramp area and continued across the runway.

The vegetation surrounding the ramp inhibited the helicopter pilot's view of the runway from his location. As they started to cross the runway, the Bell 205 pilot and Helicopter Manager noticed the Cessna 208 had just lifted off the runway. The Cessna 208 pilot stated that he had just completed the takeoff roll and was approximately 20 feet above ground level (AGL) when he heard the helicopter pilot state that he was departing to the South.

The Cessna 208 pilot stated that he did not have time to respond to the call before the helicopter climbed above the trees ahead and to his right crossing the runway north to south approximately 500 feet in front of him. He then stated over the radio that he was "breaking right" and turned right behind the helicopter while climbing above him.

The Bell 205 pilot stated that he should have confirmed the location and status of the C-208 with a radio call to the Cessna 208 pilot before he began his departure. He also added that he should have made a radio call while on the ground, announcing his location and intentions to depart. The FAA Aeronautical Information Manual (AIM) contains recommended communication procedures for non-towered airports for instances just like this.

Airport Operations Without An Operating Control Tower

It is essential that pilots be alert and look for other traffic and exchange traffic information when approaching or departing an airport without an operating control tower. This is of particular importance since other aircraft may not have communication capability or, in some cases, pilots may not communicate their presence or intentions when operating into or out of non-towered airports.

On March 13, 2018, the FAA updated Advisory Circular AC 90-66B that deals with operations at non-towered airports.

To achieve the greatest degree of safety, it is essential that:

- All radio-equipped aircraft transmit and receive on a common frequency identified for the purpose of airport advisories.
- Pilots use the correct airport name, at the beginning and end of each self-announce transmission, when exchanging traffic information to reduce the risk of confusion.
- Pilots clarify intentions if a communication sent by either their aircraft or another aircraft was potentially not received or misunderstood.
- Pilots limit communications on CTAF frequencies to safety-essential information regarding arrivals, departures, traffic flow, takeoffs, and landings. The CTAF should not be used for personal conversations.

The phrase, “ANY TRAFFIC IN THE AREA, PLEASE ADVISE,” is not a recognized self-announce position and/or intention phrase and should not be used under any condition. Any traffic that is present at the time of your self-announcement that is capable of radio communications should reply without being prompted to do so.

There are three ways for pilots to communicate their intention and obtain airport/traffic information when operating at an airport that does not have an operating tower. (1) by communicating with an FSS, (2) a UNICOM operator, or (3) by making a self-announce broadcast. **NOTE-** FSS airport advisories are available only in Alaska.

Aircrew members – you too have a role in assisting the pilot in looking for other traffic.

Remember – See something, Say Something!

Make yourself heard, seen and safe!

/s/ Keith C. Raley

Keith C. Raley
Chief, Aviation Safety, Training, Program
Evaluation, and Quality Management
DOI, Office of Aviation Services

/s/ J. Kent Hamilton

J. Kent Hamilton
Branch Chief, Aviation Safety
Management Systems
USDA, Forest Service

TBL 4-1-1
Summary of Recommended Communication Procedures

Facility at Airport	Frequency Use	Communication/Broadcast Procedures		
		Outbound	Inbound	Practice Instrument Approach
1. UNICOM (No Tower or FSS)	Communicate with UNICOM station on published CTAF frequency (122.7; 122.8; 122.725; 122.975; or 123.0). If unable to contact UNICOM station, use self-announce procedures on CTAF.	Before taxiing and before taxiing on the runway for departure.	10 miles out. Entering downwind, base, and final. Leaving the runway.	
2. No Tower, FSS, or UNICOM	Self-announce on MULTICOM frequency 122.9.	Before taxiing and before taxiing on the runway for departure.	10 miles out. Entering downwind, base, and final. Leaving the runway.	Departing final approach fix (name) or on final approach segment inbound.
3. No Tower in operation, FSS open	Communicate with FSS on CTAF frequency.	Before taxiing and before taxiing on the runway for departure.	10 miles out. Entering downwind, base, and final. Leaving the runway.	Approach completed/terminated
4. FSS Closed (No Tower)	Self-announce on CTAF.	Before taxiing and before taxiing on the runway for departure.	10 miles out. Entering downwind, base, and final. Leaving the runway.	
5. Tower or FSS not in operation	Self-announce on CTAF.	Before taxiing and before taxiing on the runway for departure.	10 miles out. Entering downwind, base, and final. Leaving the runway.	

AIM, paragraph 4-1-9, Traffic Advisory Practices at Airports Without Operating Control Towers.