



Department of the Interior

Aviation

Safety Alert



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Subject: Midair Collision Avoidance

Area of Concern: GOM Oil Spill Operations

Distribution: All Aviation Operations

Discussion: Numerous SAFECOMs have been submitted in the past few weeks describing near mid-air collisions (NMAC) in the Gulf of Mexico supporting oil spill operations. Given the magnitude of the spill, it's easy to understand why the airspace is saturated with aircraft and may continue that way for a while. It's imperative the pilot and aircrew maintain a good lookout doctrine for other aircraft especially when the mission requires occasional focus on the surface or anything other than the sky you're sharing.

The rules for maintaining separation from other aircraft in VFR conditions are spelled out in FAR 91.113: "when weather conditions permit, regardless of whether an operation is conducted under instrument flight rules or visual flight rules, vigilance shall be maintained by each person operating an aircraft so as to **see and avoid** other aircraft."

In order to support the incredible operational requirements of many agencies, air assets from local, state, federal, and private organizations are responding resulting in a significant number of aircraft in a limited geographical space. Needless to say, the "big sky, small aircraft" theory is certainly not applicable.

Don't let this happen to you !

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Common radio frequencies and known reporting points where pilots communicate position, altitude and direction of travel are just a few of the controls operators can utilize to increase awareness and minimize risk.
2. Communicating operating plans to the Incident Command System and informing other known operators will further increase others awareness concerning your particular operations. It's always better to identify the level of saturation before you head to the flight line.
3. Empower everyone aboard the aircraft to keep a sharp lookout. Educate them in how to identify and report traffic using the clock method. Communication is a critical component of effective CRM and the life they save may be their own!



- 4. Don't solely rely on flight following from ATC. They're only going to provide what they see on their radar which is not much at lower altitudes and is also dependant upon controller workload.

For further information on NMAC and tools to use for NMAC prevention, check out:

1. FAA Advisory Circular 90-48C, *Pilots' Role in Collision Avoidance*, alerts all pilots to the potential hazards of midair collision and near midair collision, and to emphasize those basic problem areas related to the human causal factors where improvements in pilot education, operating practices, procedures, and improved scanning techniques are needed to reduce midair conflicts.
2. SEE and AVOID.org is a DoD sponsored flight safety website created to educate the aviation community on mid-air collision avoidance and flight safety. Midair collisions continue to be a problem. According to the SEEandAVOID.org web site, since 1978 there have been an average of 30 midair collisions each year in the United States. These collisions resulted in an average of 75 deaths per year. There are also more than 450 near-midair collisions reported each year. Since general aviation pilots, by and large, use the Internet to get their most important flight planning information, such as weather, Notices to Airmen (NOTAMs), and routing, the SeeAndAvoid portal provides key information for flight planning.



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