

Keeping the Skies Less Congested

By Jules McConnel

Most accidents in skydiving are now happening under perfectly functioning parachutes.

In the last year there has been a particular increase in canopy collisions amongst inexperienced and highly experienced skydivers.

We are all canopy pilots – some of us better than others. But if we don't start thinking, looking and taking care of ourselves and each other whilst flying our parachutes then these accidents will continue to occur to the detriment of our sport and our close friends. Let's all take responsibility and start flying more safely.

It starts from before we get into the plane:

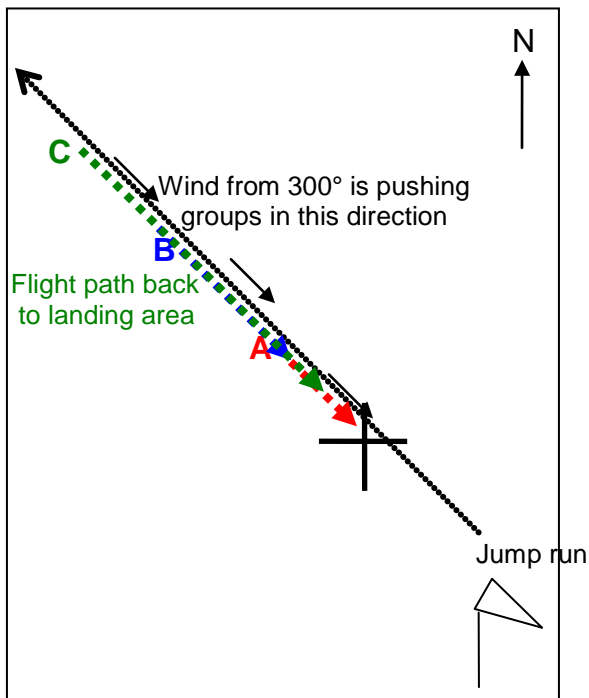
- Have a flight plan before you put your gear on:
 - If on first load spend a couple of minutes checking wind socks and forecast winds to come up with a flight plan.
 - If on later loads ask the previous loads what the winds are doing or watch previous loads landing to determine your own flight path
- Before boarding the plane determine who's doing what to organise exit order
- What are the winds doing to determine how much separation between groups

Spotting aircraft:

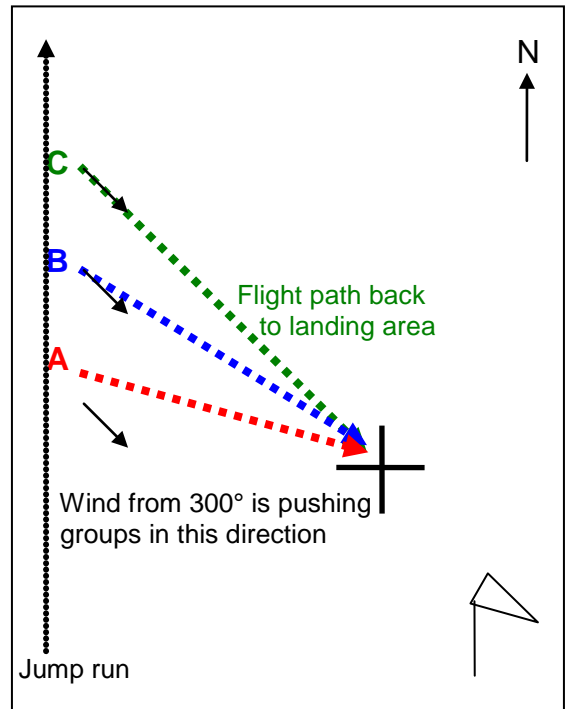
- Offsetting jump run – coastal drop zones have been implementing offset jump runs for years and it appears to be a much safer option than into wind jump runs that could be implemented at all drop zones

EXAMPLE:

In both scenarios below the winds are from 300° all the way up to height varying from 10kts to 20kts. Three separate groups exit the aircraft with the same amount of separation in respect to time – Groups A, B and C



1. Into wind Jump Run



2. Offset jump run

SCENARIO 1- Into wind Jump Run:

On opening the groups are naturally flying into each other (identified by black arrows showing winds automatically pushing groups in same direction). Not a great scenario when you are kicking out line twists flying back into another group... Group C flies into group B who flies into group A to make it back to the drop zone. Ideally the groups will fly to one side of jump run so they don't fly back into the group ahead of them. This diagram looks pretty **CONGESTED**, doesn't it?

SCENARIO 2 – Offset Jump Run:

Each group from opening are automatically flying away from each other (small black arrows showing wind automatically pushing groups in same direction, but they remain separate). Coloured arrows show direct flight path for each group to make it back to the drop zone from opening. Looks pretty **CLEAR**, doesn't it?

Track off:

- Away from centre of formation, pick a heading to stay on line. In larger formations do not cross paths and keep your eyes open
- For freeflyers doing a barrel roll is a good technique to check airspace
- Perfect your track on every jump
- If you have gone low on a formation – track away before break off altitude and open 500' lower than planned opening height of group to ensure safe separation

Opening:

- Check airspace prior to opening
- As parachute is opening fly your harness through the opening and get hands on rear risers ready to avoid any collision
- Keep eyes peeled for traffic
- Make sure your airspace is CLEAR before collapsing slider
- Check all your group has opened and determine NOW where you are in the group. If highest and have slow canopy, then stay up there, if you are lowest with a slow canopy you may allow people to pass by staying on brakes or spiral down to get out of other's way. Make sensible decisions early to separate your group so you don't congest the landing area.
- When flying back to the drop zone, do not fly directly up or down jump run into other groups. Go slightly off wind line and keep an eye out for other groups in the plane. Determine where you fit amongst these people EARLY so you don't have to make quick decisions in your circuit and landing.

Whilst under canopy:

- Look before you turn – you don't drive in traffic or change lanes without checking your blind spot, so don't fly like that either
- Try to stay in your group and land together.
- If you are slow, stay up; if you are fast, get down - but always keep an eye out. Do not blindly spiral to get down fast and keep out of the way, fly smart and pick your gaps.

Circuit and landing:

- We are all pilots and should fly a circuit on every single jump - have a downwind, crosswind and into wind leg. If the spot is bad you may not be able to fly the entire circuit and may have to join your circuit on the crosswind or into wind leg, but be adaptable.
- Be predictable – no spiralling in circuit and don't cut others off. You need to keep your eyes peeled at all times and know where everyone is in the circuit
- Low man has right of way, you may have to abort your super swoop to avoid traffic – at least you'll live to do another swoop
- If circuit is congested pick a flight path on either side of other parachutes (i.e. on parallel runways) not behind other parachutes where there is burble. Be conscious of other parachutes around you and set up to make room for everyone
- Land into wind – keep looking ahead at where you want to land and use your peripheral vision to avoid running into others in a congested area
- DO NOT choose crosswind landings when there are a lot of parachutes in the air. Either do a hop n pop, open high and land last, or choose to land outside the main landing area.

General:

- Educate each other - if you see someone doing the wrong thing then have a chat with them – they may not know they are doing anything wrong

Let's all take responsibility and start flying more safely.