

# SAFETY ADVISOR



A DIVISION OF THE AOPA FOUNDATION

## VOLUNTEER PILOTS

### BALANCING SAFETY & COMPASSION

YOU LOVE TO FLY, AND YOU LIKE THE IDEA OF USING YOUR PASSION TO HELP OTHERS. BUT WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BECOME A VOLUNTEER PILOT?

What skills must you have? How can you hone those skills to elevate your flying to the high level of professionalism and responsibility expected of volunteer pilots?



Explore this guide for a brief overview, and then take the Air Safety Institute *Public Benefit Flying: Balancing Safety and Compassion* free online course ([www.airsafetyinstitute.org/volunteerpilots](http://www.airsafetyinstitute.org/volunteerpilots)) for an in-depth review of volunteer flying and to bolster your proficiency.

The course profiles real-world public benefit flight scenarios and allows you to practice decision-making skills for safe choices, every flight.

## VOLUNTEER PILOT GROUPS

There are more than 60 public benefit flight groups listed on the Air Care Alliance (ACA) organization website. These groups provide patient and non-emergency medical transport, disaster relief, animal transport, environmental support, and educational and public services support, so there's ample opportunity to find and connect with the volunteer group that suits your passion. Visit the ACA website ([www.aircarealliance.org](http://www.aircarealliance.org)) for a complete listing of contact information.

This safety advisor provides general recommendations regarding volunteer flying. As each group has its own requirements, you should contact the ones you're interested in to learn more about their minimum pilot certificate, ratings, and hours required and their application, orientation, and training processes.

## FIRST, DO NO HARM



As rewarding as volunteer flying is, pilots face risks in the form of self-induced pressure to complete a flight they have signed up for—believing it's imperative to do so for their passengers' sake. But these are **not** medical emergency or air ambulance flights, and volunteer pilots need to prioritize safety above reaching the planned destination.

Physicians take an oath to never do harm to anyone. You have the same responsibility toward passengers you carry on volunteer flights. Become an expert at managing risk so the passengers under your care remain safe.

## TAKE STOCK OF YOURSELF

A first step to reducing pressure-induced risks as a volunteer pilot is to evaluate your well-being carefully. Are you under stress, on medications, feeling ill, or tired? Have you recently experienced a personal problem or a major life-changing event that has affected you emotionally? Be objective in your self-assessment and don't let outside pressure decide for you if you're fit to fly or should cancel. Should you choose the latter, volunteer pilot organizations will support your flight cancellation—they back your decision to be safe.

Once you decide you're in shape to fly, it's time to assess practical flight planning elements for a successful outcome:

- Do you meet the organization's suggested currency requirements?
- Does weather or terrain cause any concerns?
- Are there concerns about runway and fuel requirements?
- Will you be able to complete the flight safely within the organization's recommended duty time?

These items should meet at least the minimum recommended specifications required by your volunteer group. Of course, your skills and aircraft should be up to the task as well!

## EXAMPLES OF RECOMMENDED MINIMUMS BROKEN DOWN BY DAY/NIGHT AND IFR/VFR REQUIREMENTS

DAY VFR	NIGHT VFR	DAY IFR	NIGHT IFR
3 hours PIC within 30 days	15 night hours PIC	25 instrument hours with 5 hours actual IMC as PIC after instrument certification	10 night instrument hours PIC in addition to day IFR recommendation
1 landing within 30 days	1 night hour and 1 night landing within 30 days	1 IFR cross-country within 30 days	Similar operation within 60 days
2,000-foot ceiling/5 miles visibility (higher in mountainous terrain)	2,000-foot ceiling/5 miles visibility (higher in mountainous terrain)	Precision approach: 400-foot ceiling/1 mile visibility; Non-precision approach: add 200 feet and 1/2 mile visibility to lowest minimums	Precision approach: 400-foot ceiling/1 mile visibility; Non-precision approach: add 200 feet and 1/2 mile visibility to lowest minimums
File VFR flight plan if trip exceeds 50 miles	File VFR flight plan/short trip	Circling approach: published minimums or 1,000-foot ceiling/3 miles visibility, whichever is higher	Circling approaches not recommended
Use ATC flight following if available	File IFR flight plan for a trip of 50 miles or more		

### Develop Your Minimums

Volunteer pilot organizations typically specify minimums based on the type of flying required. For example, VFR observation flights such as animal count flights should never be conducted in marginal visual meteorological conditions (VMC), and some organizations may have restrictions on single-engine night and overwater flights. In all cases, develop a personal minimums checklist that provides a safety net beyond basic currency.

### Plan Ahead To Reduce Stress

There are some additional considerations to help avoid stressful decisions or situations. Here are some examples:

- Allow a flexible window for weather
- Arrange ahead of time for a backup pilot and/or airplane in case you or the airplane are not up to the task of flying (inform the organization's flight coordinator of this as soon as possible as they will typically make the arrangements)
- Postpone the flight if delays push the flight into conditions you are not comfortable with
- Be conservative with time and fuel calculations
- Become thoroughly familiar with new navigation/radio equipment ahead of time
- Practice special flight skills regularly to stay proficient (for instance, flying into a field with short/unimproved runways or a mountain airport notorious for gusty crosswinds)

- Practice the flight on a simulator to become familiar with the route and procedures

Check out the “Pressure Points” scenarios in the *Public Benefit Flying* course to become familiar with different ways you might feel pressured to complete a trip and how to apply a healthy antidote to make the right decision.



## PASSENGERS

### Safety and Comfort

You'll want to understand your passengers' needs. They may have special equipment such as a wheelchair or oxygen for a patient transport flight, or special camera equipment and photo platform requests for an environmental/surveying flight. In addition, you'll be confirming specifics with the volunteer group's trip coordinator about the number of passengers, their weights, and luggage. In the event of an animal rescue flight, you'll have to work out details for securing the animals and making sure they are comfortable during the flight.

*Note: Oxygen and certain equipment must be approved by appropriate regulatory agencies such as the FAA and/or DOT for use in aircraft, especially if equipment is attached to the aircraft.*

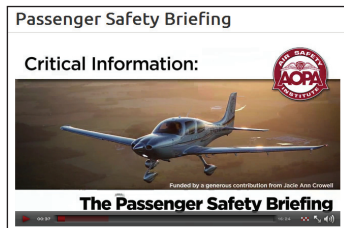
### **This Is Your Captain Speaking**



Think of yourself as an airline pilot who's choosing the smoothest flight level ride for her passengers. You should apply the same consideration during a volunteer flight. This is especially important as passengers may be nervous or not feeling well; understanding their needs is paramount to everyone's safety and comfort. You'll have ample opportunity to manage their expectations of the flight during initial contact, at which time you can also confirm their special needs.

### **The Briefing**

Preflight, cabin, and emergency procedures briefings should be at the top of your list before takeoff. Go well beyond the FAA legal specifications, which require that all passengers are secured with safety belts (and shoulder harnesses, if installed) and instructed on their use before moving the aircraft. But don't stop there! Wouldn't it be a good idea to discuss what might happen in the unlikely event of an emergency landing? You'd want to be rescued quickly...but will rescue crews know where to look? How can your passengers assist or call for help?



View the Air Safety Institute's video, *Critical Information: The Passenger Safety Briefing* ([www.airsafetyinstitute.org/passengerbriefing](http://www.airsafetyinstitute.org/passengerbriefing)), which covers often-overlooked items that should be part of every preflight passenger briefing. You'll find survival tips from NTSB and CAP experts and learn the single best way to increase your odds of rescue, including a helpful emergency equipment/rescue information briefing card to download and share with your passengers.

If at any time you anticipate flight conditions that might leave your passengers uncomfortable, please cancel the flight—you don't want to add to their stress. And make it a point during the flight to ask how everyone's doing. Pay attention to how they respond—their tone can alert you to potential air sickness or deteriorating comfort.

*Note: Child restraint seats must be approved by the FAA and other regulatory agencies for use in an aircraft.*

## **FLIGHT PLANNING**

A volunteer flight requires additional flight planning considerations beyond those for a regular cross-country flight. It's possible that you'll pick up your passenger from another location, which means you have to flight plan from your airport to your passenger's departure point. This requires in-depth fuel and weather contingency planning and ensuring you have the correct aeronautical charts for all legs of the flight.



## Briefings Checklist

To print out the Volunteer Pilot Quick Reference Checklist, visit [www.airsafetyinstitute.org/vpchecklist](http://www.airsafetyinstitute.org/vpchecklist)

### Initial Contact with Passengers

#### First Call

- Contact details/appointment time
- FBO/meeting time
- Cancellation reasons/back up plan
- Lack of inflight lavatory
- Inflight comforts (sunglasses/reading material/sweater)
- Observation flights: maps, minimum altitude/visibility

#### Confirm Details & Special Needs

- Passengers/baggage (numbers/weights)
- Supplemental oxygen\*
- Approved child restraint seat\*
- Step stool to enter/exit aircraft
- Wheelchair needs
- Animals: secured/walked prior to flight
- Observation flights: photography/video equipment, doors removed

#### Identify Flying Experience

- GA flying/safety explanation
- Assistant (base on passengers' anxiety level)

\* Oxygen equipment and child restraint seats must be approved by the FAA and other regulatory agencies for use in an aircraft.

### Day of Flight

#### Preflight Briefing

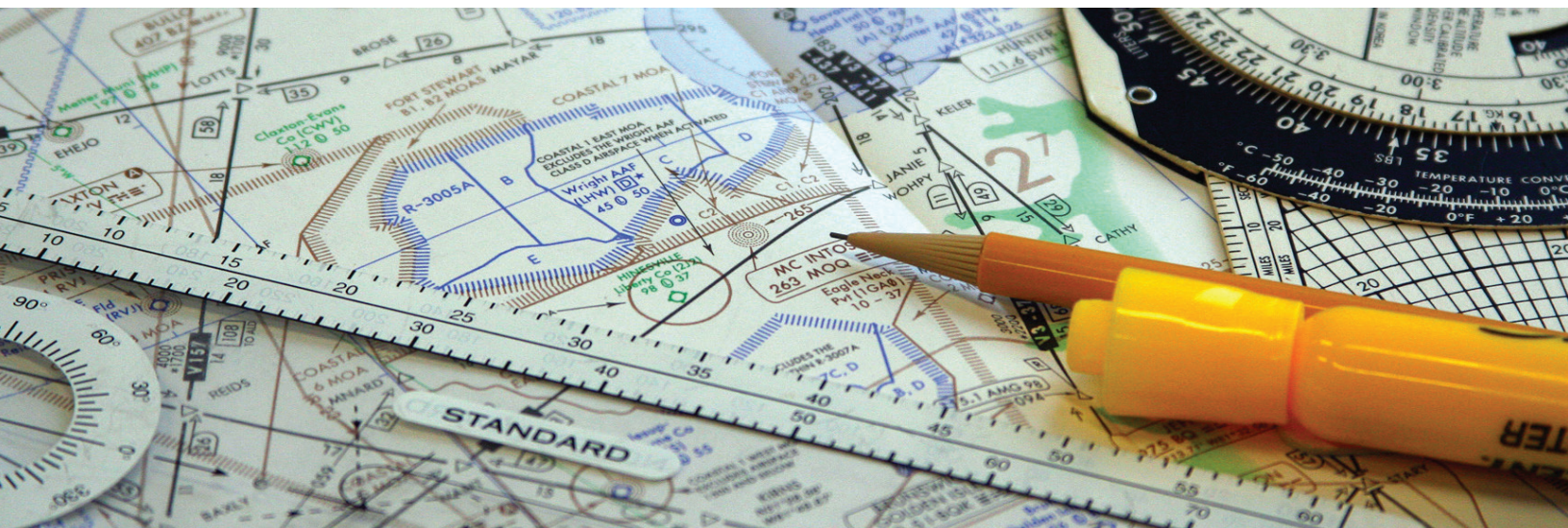
- Welcome cards/forms to be signed
- Weather forecast update (flight conditions/changes to ETE)
- Ramp safety (spinning propellers/escort passengers)
- Safe aircraft boarding/exiting (handholds/stepping areas)
- Sterile cockpit (takeoff/landing)
- ATC communication/mute intercom at times
- Engine/gear sounds (climb/cruise/descent and gear retraction/extension)

#### Cabin Briefing

- How to adjust/lock seats (especially important for right front seat passenger)
- Seatbelts (shoulder harness if installed):
  - How to fasten/unfasten
  - Fastened before taxi/takeoff/landing
  - Keep latched in flight
  - Secure child restraint seats
- Questions?

#### Sick Sacks & Emergency Procedures

- Speak up if feeling ill
- Sick sacks/emergency exits/windows/emergency equipment locations
- How to open/close doors
- Rapid aircraft evacuation procedures
- Parachute equipped aircraft: emergency deployment



You may also be asked to fly into unusual environments such as busy terminal areas, mountain or coastal airports, and over hostile terrain. This means you'll need to sharpen your preflight pencil and prebrief on noise abatement, terminal layout/FBO location, runway layout and condition, nearby airspace, survival equipment, and clothing appropriate for terrain being flown over, to name a few examples.

You'll also need to take another look at your ability to fly the requested route in terms of your training and proficiency. One great tool you can use is the ASI Flight Risk Evaluator ([www.airsafetyinstitute.org/flightrisktool](http://www.airsafetyinstitute.org/flightrisktool)) to get an objective assessment of potential risks associated with your planned flight. Also, practice flight planning decision making with several interactive scenarios in the *Public Benefit Flying* online course.

### COMPASSION CALL SIGN



The Air Care Alliance's international aircraft call sign "COMPASSION" is approved by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and can be used by pilots conducting public benefit flights to indicate to air traffic control (ATC) the general nature of the flight. The call sign cannot be used in certain situations such as

positioning or ferry flights, or for routine personal or business flights. Detailed instructions are included in the *Public Benefit Flying* online course and on the ACA website. While some groups use proprietary call signs such as "Angel Flight" and "CAP," which are also understood and recognized by ATC, groups that do not have or use proprietary call signs, including public benefit flights that don't transport patients such as environmental, veterans, and educational flights, may use the "COMPASSION" call sign.

### Inflight Emergencies

In the event of an aircraft emergency, or if your passenger becomes severely ill and his or her condition might become life threatening, you should immediately declare an emergency with ATC, ask for priority handling, and use the "Lifeguard" call sign. This is the only time you may use that call sign, which is normally reserved for medical/rescue flights.

### TYING IT ALL TOGETHER

Your decision to become a volunteer pilot and helping others is one of the greatest ways you can use your skills and grow as a person and pilot. But it demands an extra level of commitment and professionalism. Think of the safety and redundancy techniques used by commercial flight crews to keep their passengers safe and apply this to every volunteer flight you do.

To get started, take ASI's free *Public Benefit Flying: Balancing Safety and Compassion* online course. Satisfactory completion of the course qualifies toward AOPA Accident Forgiveness and FAA Wings.

## PERSONAL MINIMUMS RECOMMENDATIONS

To print out the Volunteer Pilot Personal Minimums Checklist, visit [www.airsafetyinstitute.org/personal-minimums-checklist](http://www.airsafetyinstitute.org/personal-minimums-checklist)

**Note:** Check your organization's minimums as they may be more restrictive.

### General Aviation Experience

#### Single-engine fixed-gear: # hours in past # months

**FAA requires:** None. **ASI recommends:** Three hours in any make/model within previous three months.

#### Single-engine retractable-gear: # hours in past # months

**FAA requires:** None. **ASI recommends:** Three hours in any retractable-gear make/model within previous three months.

#### Multiengine: # hours in past # months

**FAA requires:** None. **ASI recommends:** Three hours in same or similar make/model within previous three months.

### Operational Currency/Proficiency

#### Flight review within previous # months

**FAA requires:** 24 calendar months (FAR 61.56(c)).  
**ASI recommends:** 12 calendar months; if instrument rated, the flight review should include an instrument proficiency check (IPC), regardless of legal instrument currency.

#### Day landings: # landings in previous # days

**FAA requires:** Three landings in previous 90 days when carrying passengers (FAR 61.57(a)).  
**Tailwheel—**Three full-stop landings in any tailwheel make/model within previous 90 days.  
**ASI recommends:** One landing in previous 30 days, in addition to the FAA requirement; **Tailwheel—**Three full-stop landings in any tailwheel make/model within previous 30 days.

#### Night landings: # night landings in previous # days

**FAA requires:** Three full-stop night landings in previous 90 days when carrying passengers (FAR 61.57(b)). **ASI recommends:** One full-stop night landing in previous 30 days, in addition to the FAA requirement; **Tailwheel—**Three full-stop landings at night in any tailwheel make/model within previous 30 days.

#### IFR: # instrument hours and # instrument approaches in the past # days/months

**FAA requires:** Six instrument approaches, intercepting, tracking and holding in previous six calendar months (FAR 61.57(c)). **ASI recommends:** In addition to the FAA requirement, one hour of actual or simulated instrument flight and one instrument

approach in previous 30 days; also, an IPC within the previous six calendar months.

### Weather Conditions

#### VFR: Ceiling # feet/visibility # miles

**FAA requires:** Airspace-dependent—no less than clear of clouds, one mile visibility (FAR 91.155). **ASI recommends:** Outside traffic pattern—no less than 2,000-foot ceiling and five miles visibility; Within traffic pattern—1,500-foot ceiling and three miles. Use caution in mountainous terrain.

#### IFR - Departure: Ceiling # feet/visibility # miles

**FAA requires:** None. **ASI recommends:** Local instrument approach minimums, so that an immediate return can be made. If the airport has no instrument approach, use minimums from the nearest suitable airport with an instrument approach within 15 minutes.

#### IFR - Arrival: Ceiling # feet/visibility # miles

**FAA requirement:** Instrument approach minimums **ASI recommends:** Precision approach—400 feet and one mile; Non-precision approach—Lowest minimums applicable plus 200 feet and one-half mile. Example: If approach minimums are 450 feet and one mile, personal minimums would be 650 feet and 1.5 miles; Circling approach—Published minimums or 1,000-foot ceiling and three miles, whichever is higher; not recommended at night.

### Crosswind Component

#### No more than # knots

**FAA requires:** None. **ASI recommends:** 75 percent of maximum demonstrated crosswind. Example: 16 (knots max demonstrated crosswind)  $\times$  .75 = 12 knots recommended crosswind component; **Tailwheel—**no more than 10 knots of crosswind.

### Fuel Reserve

#### Day VFR: # hour(s) # minutes

#### Night VFR: # hour(s) # minutes

#### IFR: # hour(s) # minutes

**FAA requires:** Day VFR—30 minutes; Night VFR—45 minutes; Day or Night IFR—45 minutes. (FAR 91.151, 91.167)

**ASI recommends:** Minimum 60 minutes for all, assuming that all contingencies have been accounted for (diversions, holding, headwinds, etc.). In other words, the airplane should land with at least one hour of fuel in the tanks.

### Other

#### Rest: # hours of rest (sleep and relaxation) in previous 24 hours

**FAA requires:** None. **ASI recommends:** 10 hours.



## LEARN MORE



Find out what it is like to join fellow volunteer pilots and share the sense of accomplishment they've felt when seeing the smiling faces of patients and families and the appreciation of communities who were in need of medical supplies or relief transport. Volunteer pilots and their organizations provide many services other

than patient transport such as educational and introductory flights, environmental support, disaster relief and damage assessment, land conservation, animal relocation, and transportation of veterans and their families, to name a few. Visit the Air Care Alliance organization for details ([www.aircarealliance.org](http://www.aircarealliance.org)).

### Additional Resources

Volunteer Pilot Quick Reference Checklist (kneeboard):

[www.airsafetyinstitute.org/vpchecklist](http://www.airsafetyinstitute.org/vpchecklist)

Volunteer Pilot Personal Minimums Checklist  
and Recommendations:

[www.airsafetyinstitute.org/personal-minimums-checklist](http://www.airsafetyinstitute.org/personal-minimums-checklist)

Volunteer Pilot First Contact Briefing Checklist:

[www.airsafetyinstitute.org/initial-briefing](http://www.airsafetyinstitute.org/initial-briefing)

Volunteer Pilot Passenger Briefing Checklist:

[www.airsafetyinstitute.org/paxbriefing](http://www.airsafetyinstitute.org/paxbriefing)

ASI Flight Risk Evaluator (desktop version):

[www.airsafetyinstitute.org/flightrisktool](http://www.airsafetyinstitute.org/flightrisktool)

ASI Flight Risk Evaluator (mobile version):

[www.airsafetyinstitute.org/apps/flightrisk](http://www.airsafetyinstitute.org/apps/flightrisk)

ASI Passenger Safety Briefing Video:

[www.airsafetyinstitute.org/passengerbriefing](http://www.airsafetyinstitute.org/passengerbriefing)

ASI Passenger Safety Briefing Card

(Emergency Equipment/Rescue Information):

[www.airsafetyinstitute.org/emergencycard](http://www.airsafetyinstitute.org/emergencycard)



**AIR SAFETY INSTITUTE**  
A DIVISION OF THE AOPA FOUNDATION  
421 AVIATION WAY  
FREDERICK, MD 21701

800.638.3101  
[AIRSAFETYINSTITUTE.ORG](http://AIRSAFETYINSTITUTE.ORG)

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