Avoiding a Midair Collision in Alaska – Airport Traffic Advisory Reminders

Almost all midair collisions occur during daylight hours and in visual flight rules (VFR) conditions. Most collisions happen within 5 miles of an airport (during final or short final approach to landing), and usually on weekend afternoons. Pilots in Alaska need to communicate, listen, and maintain a visual scan in all areas where they take off and land such as lakes, rivers, gravel bars, and especially around airports.

Communicating on the Correct Frequency
- A common traffic advisory frequency (CTAF) is designated for carrying out airport advisory practices while operating into or out of a nontowered airport. The CTAF may be a UNICOM, MULTICOM, flight service station (FSS), or tower frequency (*Aeronautical Information Manual* [AIM] 4-1-9.b.1.).
- In Alaska, a CTAF may also be designated for carrying out advisory practices while operating in designated areas with a high volume of VFR traffic (AIM 4-1-9.b.2.).
- The CTAF for a particular airport or area is contained in the Chart Supplement Alaska (the peach book), Alaska Terminal Publication, Chart Supplement U.S., Instrument Approach Procedure Charts, and Instrument Departure Procedure Charts. The CTAF can also be obtained by contacting any FSS *(*AIM 4-1-9.b.3.).
- Pilots can communicate their intentions and obtain airport and traffic information when operating at a nontowered airport by communicating with an FSS that is providing airport advisories on a CTAF or by making a self-announced broadcast on the CTAF.
- Use of the appropriate CTAF, combined with visual alertness and application of recommended good operating practices, will enhance safety of flight into and out of nontowered airports and landing areas (AIM 4-1-9.b.3.).
- Pilots operating at tower-controlled airports should follow directions as indicated in the Chart Supplement Alaska and as directed by air traffic control (ATC). Pilots are responsible for seeing and avoiding other aircraft while under ATC direction (14 *Code of Federal Regulations* 91.113).

Before Takeoff
1. Scan the approach areas for possible landing traffic by maneuvering the aircraft to provide a clear view of such areas.
2. Self-announce on the CTAF, if needed.

Before Entering an Airport Traffic Area
1. Ensure you have selected the correct frequency on your radio.
2. State the identification of the UNICOM, MULTICOM, airport, lake, or landing area you are calling at the beginning of each transmission.
3. Speak slowly and clearly.
4. Notify the UNICOM, MULTICOM, airport, or landing area traffic about 10 miles from the airport, reporting altitude, aircraft type, aircraft identification, location relative to the airport, and whether landing or overflight. Request wind information and runway in use.
5. Report on downwind, base, and final approach.
6. Report leaving the runway or landing area.

More Helpful Tips
- If flying in an applicable area, be sure to have a current CTAF area map (see Additional Resources below).

- Ensure that any publications you use are current, especially if they have CTAFs listed.
- When it is not practical to initiate radio contact, monitor the radio and listen for other aircraft, and keep up your scan for traffic, particularly when operating in congested areas.
- If you are ever unsure if you should make a CTAF transmission, remember, "**When in doubt, call yourself out**" on the radio.
- Pilots of inbound traffic should monitor and communicate as appropriate on the designated CTAF from 10 miles to landing. Pilots of departing aircraft should monitor and communicate on the appropriate frequency from start-up, during taxi, and until 10 miles from the airport unless regulations or local procedures require otherwise (AIM 4-1-9.c.1.).
- Be particularly alert before turning to the base leg and during the final approach to landing. At nontowered airports and landing areas, avoid entering the traffic pattern on the base leg or from a straight-in approach to the runway or landing area. Make all traffic pattern turns to the left unless the Chart Supplement Alaska, visual markings, or terrain indicate turns should be made to the right (per 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* 91.126 and 91.127).
- Pilots of aircraft conducting other than arriving or departing operations at altitudes normally used by arriving and departing aircraft should monitor and communicate on the appropriate frequency while within 10 miles of the airport or landing area unless regulations or local procedures require otherwise (AIM 4-1-9.c.2.).
- In Alaska, pilots of aircraft conducting other than arriving or departing operations in designated CTAF areas should monitor and communicate on the appropriate frequency while within the CTAF area, unless regulations or local procedures require otherwise. Examples of procedures include parachute jumping/dropping, en route, and practicing maneuvers (AIM 4-1-9.c.3.).
- Proper use of a transponder will provide a higher degree of safety while operating on the ground and while airborne. Transponders with altitude reporting mode turned ON (mode C or S) substantially increase the capability of surveillance systems to see an aircraft, thus providing ATC increased situational awareness and the ability to identify potential traffic conflicts (AIM 4-1-20).
- Always turn your aircraft lights on when flying near an airport, landing area, or congested area.

Additional Resources
- CTAF area maps can be downloaded for free at the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Alaskan Region Flight Standards website:
  https://www.faa.gov/about/office_org/headquarters_offices/avs/offices/afs/divisions/alaskan_region/flyalaska/ctaf/.
- The FAA addresses communications and practices for operations at nontowered airports:
  https://www.faa.gov/regulations_policies/handbooks_manuals/aviation/airplane_handbook/media/09_afh_ch7.pdf
  https://www.faa.gov/documentLibrary/media/Advisory_Circular/AC90-66A.pdf.
- The FAA AIM contains additional information about radio communications, traffic patterns, airport operations, and preventing midair collisions:
  https://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/publications/media/aim.pdf
- Two National Transportation Safety Board safety alerts contain various midair avoidance techniques and resources:
  http://www.ntsb.gov/safety/safety-alerts/Documents/SA_045.pdf
  http://www.ntsb.gov/safety/safety-alerts/Documents/SA_058.pdf.