Avoiding a Midair Collision in Alaska – En Route Traffic Advisory Reminders

Although many pilots in Alaska may subscribe to the "Big Sky" theory of aircraft separation, fatal midair collisions have occurred in both congested, high-traffic areas and remote areas that may be far from high-traffic routes and runways. While Alaska does have vast amounts airspace and terrain, pilots still need to communicate, listen, and maintain a visual scan in all areas where they fly.

Communicating on a Common Frequency

1. The first key to communicating is selection of the correct frequency. The acronym CTAF stands for Common Traffic Advisory Frequency. A CTAF is a frequency designated for the purpose of carrying out airport advisory practices while operating to or from an airport without an operating control tower. The CTAF may be a UNICOM, MULTICOM, Flight Service Station (FSS), or tower frequency and is identified in appropriate aeronautical publications. *NOTE– FSS frequencies are available only in Alaska. (*AIM 4-1-9.b.1.)

2. In Alaska, a CTAF may also be designated for the purpose of carrying out advisory practices while operating in designated areas with a high volume of Visual Flight Rules traffic. (AIM 4-1-9.b.2.)

3. 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. Also, the CTAF can be obtained by contacting any FSS. Use of the appropriate CTAF, combined with a visual alertness and application of the following recommended good operating practices, will enhance safety of flight into and out of all uncontrolled airports. (AIM 4-1-9.b.3.)

Recommended Traffic Advisory Practices

1. 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/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.)

2. Pilots of aircraft conducting other than arriving or departing operations at altitudes normally used by arriving and departing aircraft should monitor/communicate on the appropriate frequency while within 10 miles of the airport unless required to do otherwise by the regulations or local procedures. Such operations include parachute jumping/dropping, en route, practicing maneuvers, etc. (AIM 4-1-9.c.2.)

3. In Alaska, pilots of aircraft conducting other than arriving or departing operations in designated CTAF areas should monitor/communicate on the appropriate frequency while within the designated area, unless required to do otherwise by regulations or local procedures. Such operations include parachute jumping/dropping, en route, practicing maneuvers, etc. (AIM 4-1-9.c.3.)

Helpful Tips
- Pilots are encouraged to use Air Traffic Control (ATC) flight following and FSS airport advisory services when available. They can help advise of traffic that may pose a potential conflict.
- When not in contact with ATC, pilots should use CTAFs to make position reports and while operating at airports within these areas.
- Always ensure you have the correct CTAF entered and selected on your radio.
- If you are ever unsure if you need to make a CTAF transmission, remember, "**When in doubt, call yourself out**" on the radio.
- Use CTAFs strictly for communicating your position, monitoring the position of other traffic, and communicating and monitoring potential and actual safety hazards in the area (some examples are

deteriorating weather conditions, wildlife located on the airstrip, etc.). Utilizing CTAF for personal discussion (such as sports game results, favorite fishing spots, etc.) can hinder others who need to communicate and monitor to safely get to their destination. Air-to-air communications should be conducted on 122.75.

- While there are many remote flying areas in the state, CTAF transmissions and subsequent monitoring are smart operating practices to enhance the safety of everyone. Treat remote flying areas with the same situation awareness that you would as if you were flying in a congested traffic area. Listen for other aircraft on the radio and keep up your scan for traffic.
- Compensate for blind spots in your aircraft due to aircraft design and flight attitude. Move your head or maneuver the aircraft to maintain a clear view of the area around your aircraft.
- Ensure that the radios in your aircraft work correctly and are tested on a regular basis. If a problem with a radio is suspected or discovered, be sure to have the radio repaired/replaced as to not hinder radio transmission and receive capabilities.
- Ensure any publications that are used are current, especially if they have CTAFs listed. Current publications can be accessed and downloaded for free from the Federal Aviation Administration's Digital Products website: https://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/flight_info/aeronav/digital_products/
- If flying in an applicable area, be sure to have a current CTAF area map. These maps can be found in the Alaska Chart Supplement. Maps of the Matanuska Susitna, Cook Inlet and Denali Area CTAFs can also be downloaded for free at the FAA Alaskan Region Flight Standards hyperlink: https://www.faa.gov/about/office_org/headquarters_offices/avs/offices/afs/divisions/alaskan_region/flyalaska/ctaf/
- Be aware of reporting points, practice areas, arrival/departure routings or traffic funnels where pilots can expect a large volume of traffic. Be especially vigilant in these areas.
- Pilots should consider the assistance of other crewmembers or passengers to help in looking for hazards and notifying the pilot immediately when they are concerned.
- Consider equipping with Automatic Dependent Surveillance–Broadcast Out and In technology, a traffic advisory system or a traffic alert and collision avoidance system. These technologies can provide assistance in displaying nearby traffic that pilots may not see.

Additional Resources

- A variety of midair avoidance techniques and resources are listed below in the two National Transportation Safety Board Safety Alert hyperlinks:
  http://www.ntsb.gov/safety/safety-alerts/Documents/SA_045.pdf
  http://www.ntsb.gov/safety/safety-alerts/Documents/SA_058.pdf

- The Federal Aviation Administration has some guidance documents that address pilots' roles in prevention of midair collisions:
  https://www.faa.gov/documentLibrary/media/Advisory_Circular/AC_90-48D.pdf
  https://www.faasafety.gov/gslac/alc/libview_normal.aspx?id=6851

- For more information on radio communications, en route operations, and preventing midair collisions see the Aeronautical Information Manual (AIM):
  https://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/publications/media/aim.pdf