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NEWSLETTER

May 2026 | Volume XXVI | Issue V

SAFETYWIRE



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Circle-to-land Approach Hazards – FAA ASIAS study highlights the risks with these aircraft approaches

(Source: Stuart “Kipp” Lau, AIN, April 24, 2026)



Accident airplane's flight path during final approach after crossing the runway centerline © NTSB

The FAA's Aviation Safety Information Analysis and Sharing (ASIAS) program recently published a [study](#) on circle-to-land approaches that identifies contributing factors of safety issues experienced by pilots when flying this maneuver. ASIAS analyzed data from various voluntary safety programs to offer useful insights and tips for pilots conducting circle-to-land approaches.

Pilots of business aircraft must, on occasion, fly a circling approach when they cannot land from a straight-in approach due to tailwinds, obstacles, other limitations, or the need to accommodate traffic flow for ATC. Circling approaches, according to the ASIAS study, “present an increased risk to general aviation operations because they require maneuvering at low altitude and low airspeed during the final segment of the approach and landing.”

The NTSB reports that, from 2008 to 2023, there were 10 accidents involving Part 91 or 135 operators during circling approaches, resulting in 17 fatalities.

An NTSB [safety alert](#) further cautions pilots: “Circling approaches can be riskier than other types of approaches because they often require maneuvering at low altitude and low airspeed during the final segment of the approach, increasing the opportunity for loss of control or collision with terrain. These risks are heightened when conducting circling approaches in marginal or reduced visibility conditions, and increased focus is required.”

ASIAS analysis identified three areas of interest for flight crews:

1. There is a subset of airports where conducting circling approaches is more common and conducted at a higher rate than at other airports in the National Airspace System. Pilots should be aware of the individual characteristics that require circling approaches at the airports and conduct thorough preflight and pre-approach briefings.

These airports include Teterboro (KTEB) in New Jersey; Atlanta DeKalb–Peachtree (KPDK); Chicago Executive (KPWK); Arlington Municipal (KGKY) in Texas; Eagle County Regional (KEGE) in Colorado; Scottsdale (KSDL) in Arizona; Long Beach (KLGB) and Van Nuys (KVNY) in California; and Southwest Oregon Regional (KOTH) and Rogue Valley International–Medford in Oregon (KMFR).

2. Flight crews should be aware of the circling approach obstacle protection airspace for the individual approach and airport to be used. This airspace changes both with minimum descent altitude (MDA) and aircraft category.

Flight crews should pay particular attention to differences between standard and expanded circling airspace maneuvering areas. The most recent TERPS and ICAO PAN-OPS circling criteria updates account for elevation (for example, true airspeed) and wind up to a maximum of 25 knots. Approaches with the new larger circling minima are displayed on Jeppesen approach charts with a “C” in a black square.

ASIAS recommends that pilots use all available tools to remain aware of their distance from the airfield and stay within the obstacle protection area. According to the ASIAS analysis, some flights were observed flying at low altitudes beyond the proper protected zone.

In addition, the study found that Category A and B aircraft that purposefully operate at higher Category C or D minima (larger protected areas) fly at higher altitudes and further away from obstacles, further increasing safety margins.

3. There’s a link between circling approaches and unstable approaches. With proper preflight and approach briefings, flight crews can better prepare for these types of approaches and ensure a successful, stabilized approach to landing.

ASIAS data analysis identified the following safety issues: unstable approach, low power on approach, GPWS sink rate, go-around, high-energy descent, loss of situational awareness, and high crew workload.

Guidance

Before the ASIAs study and NTSB alert on circling approaches, the FAA provided sound guidance in its “Instrument Procedures Handbook” and “Aeronautical Information Manual” (AIM).

The FAA’s handbook urges caution when attempting a circle-to-land maneuver: “Circling approaches are one of the most challenging flight maneuvers in the National Airspace System, especially for pilots of Category C and Category D turbine-powered transport category airplanes. The maneuvers are conducted at low altitude, day, and night, and often with precipitation present affecting visibility, depth perception, and the ability to adequately assess the descent profile to the landing runway.”

Furthermore, AIM 5-4-2(f) states, “Circling may require maneuvers at low altitude, a low airspeed, and in marginal weather conditions. Pilots must use sound judgment, have an in-depth knowledge of their capabilities, and fully understand the aircraft performance to determine the exact circling maneuver since weather, unique airport design, and the aircraft position, altitude, and airspeed must all be considered.”

In its safety alert, the NTSB recommends, “Before conducting a circling approach, be sure it is the best option and then brief the approach, plan its execution, and acknowledge your own limitations.”

Operators and pilots should assess whether flying a circling approach is worth its risks compared to a straight-in approach.

The NTSB safety alert provides the following excellent guidance on circling approaches:

- Fully understand the risks involved with performing a circling approach and use sound judgment if deciding to perform this approach.
- Consider your personal experience and limitations and the performance capabilities of your aircraft when planning the execution of the circling approach. Weather, runway configuration, and your aircraft’s current position, altitude, and airspeed should also be considered.
- Understand that if ATC issues you a clearance for a circling approach, you can request a different approach or divert to an airport with more capable approach facilities. It is always better to make ATC aware of your concerns rather than to attempt an approach you might not be comfortable performing.
- Acquire recurring, scenario-based training in realistic environments that includes circling approaches. Practicing these approaches routinely will increase your proficiency and make you more comfortable performing them when needed.
- If you decide to perform a circling approach, conduct a comprehensive briefing that specifies when the circling approach will begin, descent altitudes and locations, airspeeds, aircraft configuration, and go-around (or missed approach) criteria and procedures.
- When conducting a circling approach, remain at or above the circling altitude until the aircraft is continuously in a position from which a descent to landing on the intended runway can be made at a normal rate using normal maneuvers.

The ASIAs circling approach study suggests that flight crews should review the following while briefing the approach: any differences in requirements for day versus night; any notes/restrictions associated with the circling approach; whether automation can support the circle-to-land maneuver; the hazards of being low and slow, high, and fast, or unstable; the potential increase in workload and loss of situational awareness when conducting circling approaches; the impact of deteriorating weather; and the missed approach procedure and pattern from various circling positions.

Further reading:

[AINsight: Circling Can Be a Very Risky Approach](#)

Related NTSB Aviation Investigative Final Reports:

[Teterboro, New Jersey \(CEN17MA183\)](#)

[Truckee, California \(WPR21FA286\)](#)

[El Cajon, California \(WPR22FA068\)](#)



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Preparation Is Everything for Passing SAFA Ramp Inspections

(Source: Business Aviation Insider, March/April 2026)



Photo © John Harrington Photography

For foreign business aircraft operators flying in Europe, being singled out for a random Safety Assessment of Foreign Aircraft (SAFA) Programme ramp inspection can eat up precious time and valuable resources. Experts, including a former SAFA ramp inspector and the chair of the NBAA International Operators Committee, advise smart preparation and training to pass muster and avoid unplanned delays.

The SAFA Programme, established by the European Civil Aviation Conference in 1996, is designed to improve aviation safety by conducting random inspections on non-European Union carriers to ensure compliance with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) standards.

Foreign operators are subject to inspections at any time or location when landing in all EU and European Union Safety Agency (EASA) member states, as well as a selection of other countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada and the United Arab Emirates. There are 51 members in the program.

While there is some variation in scrutiny, the program follows a universal set of ICAO standards. Irregularities can leave aircraft grounded until remedial action is taken and could be reported to aircraft's domestic oversight authority depending on severity.

"I think the core of the inspections will always be the same, which means that if you have a fuel leakage it will always be dealt with in the same way because that is obvious and you have to make sure it is within limit," said Jérôme Hamon, head of the Direction Générale de l'Aviation Civile's SAFA Ramp Inspection Division. "If not, there will be a corrective action to follow."

"Yes, they need to take some time for us and be transparent, but we also are clear that ramp inspections are not a place for argument."

JÉRÔME HAMON *Head of the Direction Générale de l'Aviation Civile's SAFA Ramp Inspection Division*

Hamon, a former SAFA ramp inspector at Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport (CDG), said it's important to remember that the operator is being inspected – not the crew. "There may even be disagreement, but we conduct a thorough process to allow that to be analyzed and rectified at a later time. This should help crews who we know need to focus on preparing for their next flight," Hamon said. "Yes, they need to take some time for us and be transparent, but we also are clear that ramp inspections are not a place for argument."

The best way to pass an inspection with flying colors, Hamon said, is to "be prepared. However, if you want to be prepared, you need to first have a general understanding of what different items are checked."

Consider Specialized Training Sessions

Operators should consider conducting formal training for their crews, including rehearsal ramp inspections.

"If you already know more or less in advance what will be asked and what will be checked, then during your own flight preparations, you will be able to ensure that everything will be correct," said Hamon. "You will also detect irregularities more easily, giving you time to seek advice from your operations team."

“On one inspection a 'Remove Before Flight' flag for a landing gear pin separated so a quick-thinking pilot made an impromptu flag out of a baggage tag, and it passed muster.”

ART JOHANSON *Gulfstream G800/G650ER Captain at Pfizer*

Beware of These Common Inspection 'Defects'

Art Johanson, a Gulfstream G800/G650ER captain at Pfizer, said his company's flight operation has been fortunate to have an “excellent record” of success. There are many vulnerable areas that Pfizer's team focuses on for every flight. The most common “defects,” as they are officially called, normally center around aircraft condition and logbook defects and minimum equipment lists (MELs).

“On one inspection a 'Remove Before Flight' flag for a landing gear pin separated so a quick-thinking pilot made an impromptu flag out of a baggage tag and it passed muster,” Johanson recalled.

Flight Planning and Preparation

Flight preparation is another common area for irregularities, according to Paul Scurio, CAM, chief pilot at Sunbird Aviation and chair of NBAA's International Operators Committee (IOC). Having passed two SAFA inspections in recent years, Scurio said he has asked the inspectors to provide the most common areas that can be improved.

“Flight planning and particularly having flight plans that correlate with the items on the list of inspection items in terms of displaying the proper fuel calculations, fuel reserves and routes, both to destination and alternate are high on their list for corporate operators,” said Scurio.

Fuel monitoring is another common issue, Hamon said, for example, missing last-minute changes to aircraft weight and balance.

Typical Cabin Issues

In the cabin, the most frequent finding is secure cargo stowage. “For instance, you have passengers who have a lot of luggage, which you have no place for in the hold, but you don't want to leave the luggage on the apron. So, you put them in the cabin even if they are not correctly secured,” Hamon said. “This is a safety issue as well.”

Manuals, checklists and charts (including electronic flight bag compliance and accessibility) need to be kept updated as they regularly change, Johanson added.

Be aware that EASA does not recognize the FAA's distinctions between Part 91 and Part 135 operations. "You need to really be careful about how you're designating your flight, whether it's a business aircraft or commercial," said Scurio.

Two Key Pieces of Advice

Johanson has advice for passing inspections: "Incorporate preparation and double checking into every single day and every single flight. The second is attitude, a good one. Since you're prepared, you've got nothing to worry about," he said.

Pfizer's flight operation began a formal aircraft audit program several years ago that assigns each tail a captain, maintenance tech and line serviceman that conducts a structured quarterly audit. "The audit serves many purposes but above all, it is to ensure the aircraft is in compliance and current with all applicable regulations," Johanson said.

"Aside from organizational training, the EU RIP/SAFA guide already has the answers to the test," he continued. "Be prepared. Assign a crew member to each inspector if possible. We usually have one pilot doing the cockpit stuff and interior inspection. One pilot will assist with the external inspection."

"Make sure before you end the inspection that you understand what findings might be written up, what the category is and how that category was determined."

PAUL SCURIO *Chief pilot, Sunbird Aviation / Chair of NBAA International Operators Committee*

Scurio also advised putting together a SAFA binder with all essential information. "It sets the impression for the inspector that you know what you're doing, he said. "Make sure before you end the inspection that you understand what findings might be written up, what the category is and how that category was determined."

Dirty Dozen Lesson #3: Assertiveness isn't aggression: speak up when you think something isn't right

(Source: Anneke Tucker, Vertical Magazine, April 24, 2026)



Early in my career, I found a crack on a titanium firewall. I pulled the structural repair manual and there was not a repair for this metal and area. I double-checked with the structural lead.

My manager pressed, just stop-drill it like stainless...

But there wasn't an approved repair scheme. This wasn't a stainless cowling or secondary structure. It was the barrier between the engine and the aircraft, the thing designed to contain a catastrophic failure.

So, I pushed back, as uncomfortable as it was, and I told them I needed an approved repair to proceed.

Assertiveness is not aggression or insubordination; it's speaking up when something isn't right. It's standing in a room with people who have more experience, more authority, and saying 'I can't proceed with the current information.'

It isn't a no, it is a pause in a moment that allows everyone to regroup, ensuring that the maintenance is going to be done properly, not only for your certificate, but for the safety of that aircraft. Often, we can come together and think of an alternate to the situation that still maintains safety and integrity.

Assertiveness can be incredibly lonely. When you're standing there as the only person who won't let something go, you can start second-guessing yourself. Am I wrong? Am I overreacting? What if this turns out to be nothing? Those doubts are real.

But, at the end of the day, you're the one who signs off on that work. If that firewall fails and people get hurt, you're the one that will carry the burden.

How do we find that courage?

Saint Augustine said it: “Wrong is wrong, even if everyone is doing it. Right is right, even if no one is doing it.”

Recognize the pressure:

- Social: Everyone else thinks it’s fine
- Hierarchical: Someone higher is telling you to do it
- Operational: The aircraft needs to fly

Know what you’re protecting:

- Your integrity
- The aircrew and aircraft

Ask for it in writing:

- “Show me the approved repair procedure.”
- “I need to see the engineering disposition.”

Speak up early:

- The longer you wait, the harder it gets. Don’t wait until you’re being pressured to sign off.

“I’m not comfortable with this” is a complete sentence.

For leaders: If someone is pushing back on a call, don’t shut them down. Ask why. Create an environment where your technicians have a voice.

This isn’t just mechanics and inspectors. This is for pilots uncomfortable with the weather, dispatchers who see a deferral that doesn’t sit right, engineers who know the calculation doesn’t add up.

Assertiveness can be the difference between safe and catastrophic.

That firewall was repaired correctly. It could have cost me through relationships or being labeled difficult, but I can live with that. What I couldn’t live with is signing off on something I knew was wrong and reading about it in an accident report.

Part 3 of a 12-part series on the Dirty Dozen in aviation maintenance by Anneke Tucker, originally published on her LinkedIn page. Tucker is an FAA-certificated A&P mechanic, IA, and 23-year aviation maintenance veteran. She is currently a consultant at Attain Aviation, specializing in Part 145 certification, quality systems, workforce development, and human factors in MRO environments.

SAFETY MANAGER'S CORNER

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Please reach out to Brandon Heath (brandon.heath@argus.aero) for more information and/or to register for the course.

Course Objectives

- Describe the 4 Components and the 12 Elements of the ICAO Framework which closely align with CFR Part 5.
- Become familiar with characteristics of an effective and “just” safety culture.
- Use and apply the Safety Risk Management process.
- Describe what Change Management is concerned with according to SMS.
- Become familiar with Safety Performance Indicators (SPI)
- Describe how to implement an Internal Evaluation Program (IEP) and where to find appropriate checklists
- Become familiar with Root Cause analysis.

Quote of the Month

Great things are done by a series of small things brought together.

BY: Vincent Van Gogh



He certainly had an ear for a wise quote, that Mr. Van Gogh. Putting all the pieces together is rarely easy, often dedication and diligence are necessary. The realization that every small effort and accomplishment leads to a greater one should motivate every individual and drive consistent action. Bad days come our way from time to time, of course, but they must not remain and rule. Strive to stride forward, fueled by those small things that make a difference and foment improvement one bit at a time. The one-step-at-a-time clichés are endless (Rome wasn't built in a day; A journey begins with one step; etc.) but they are also true! Doing the small things right exemplifies the highest level of personal behavior and model performance.

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