

“EYES WIDE OPEN”

by Brent Anderson

At times our best source for aircraft *risk management* is **EYES WIDE-OPEN**.

As pilots, one of the most difficult and frustrating situations we can find ourselves in is to have our aircraft grounded due to damage at an airport away from home. Here we sit, stuck, without transportation. The airport line service has damaged our aircraft, we don't care for the fixed base operator and by this time, after a few choice words, the fixed base operator doesn't care much for us. But like it or not, we may have to hire him to repair the aircraft because there is not another operator on the field.

Even if he has insurance, we have still lost our airplane for the duration of the repair. Who knows how long that will take, and when we finally do get the airplane back, it now has less value due to a damage history. (For additional information regarding this situation refer to Tom Chappell's article ["Diagnosing a Hull Claim"](#) on our web site). What is the best way to protect ourselves against this most unfortunate situation? In my opinion, it is simply, **EYES WIDE OPEN!**

While taxiing into the ramp I search for a likely place to park, hopefully not in anybody's way. Not having received any traffic advisory on the way in I'm not too hopeful an eager line service person will come out to meet me with a set of chocks. Finding a spot on the slightly sloped ramp I'm not surprised to find no one in sight. While shutting down the engines I take the time to glance behind me wondering if I roll backwards what am I going to hit. It's just a King Air. I've never found myself very trusting of these little pull levers to set a brake. I need a solid foot pedal with a positive clicking sound as you jam it down to set the brake as in my Chevy pickup.

Still no one in sight as I sit holding the brakes while putting away my headset and looking for my brief case. Trust the brake I must, as I step out on to the ramp knowing there is no way I can stop a 6,000 lb airplane if it decides to roll. As I scan the ramp for a set of chocks I can steal, another twin, a Navajo, taxis in and parks next to me. Finally, here comes Mr. Line Service. I suspect he's hoping for a fuel sale since there are now two of us. I say, "I think" because he is not the usual type line service person I have come to expect.

With an over-sized belly, OD green T-shirt one size to small, blue jeans with the crotch almost dragging the ramp, as he bends over to fetch some chocks, my first impression is "Mr. Plumber", if you know what I mean. Now I have the option to buy fuel here or I can wait until my next stop. With this in mind, I chock my airplane and let him know that I'm not sure yet if I need any fuel. "Mr. Navajo" immediately thumbs up wanting fuel, so off goes "Plumber" to get his truck. Pulling up in front he jumps out, reeling out the hose and heads for the wing intent on getting this job done.

"Mr. Navajo" points to the grounding cable still on the truck and proceeds to walk off toward the terminal. "Plumber" drops the gas nozzle on the ground and trudges back to the truck to grab the ground cable, a rusty wire with what appears to be a bear clamp attached to the end obviously not used too often. Now I'm thinking perhaps "Mr.

Navajo” may have walked off a little to soon. “Plumber” grabs the clamp with both hands squeezing it wide open to fasten it wherever he decides might make a good grounding place. Sure enough, the most obvious place for that bear clamp is that nice shiny nose strut. Talk about my EYES WIDE OPEN! He grabs up the nozzle from the ground and jams it into the tank, being sure to put it all the way in hitting the bottom of the tank while resting the shut off valve on top the unprotected wing. I’ve seen enough. No fuel here for me today as I look around thinking maybe I should move my airplane as far away as I can to the other side of the ramp.

We take the time to plan a flight and check the weather. We take the time to preflight the aircraft, looking at everything to be sure all is well and can reasonably be expected not to come apart in flight. We do our run-up checking engines, props, radios, everything, just to be sure all looks and sounds as it should. But when it comes to trusting our aircraft to a stranger we seem, at times, to have on blinders. In most cases, there are plenty of clues that our aircraft is in danger if we would just go in with our EYES WIDE OPEN. Your own eyes can be your best insurance in preventing a most difficult and frustrating occurrence.

About the Author:

Brent Anderson has over 26 years of aviation experience and serves in our Airport and Commercial Aviation insurance division. In addition to being an Aviation Insurance Specialist he also serves as the company pilot of our Beech Baron. Brent has managed all phases of airport operations including airline and general aviation fueling services, aircraft maintenance and airfield operations. He was extensively involved in flight training operations as owner of a federally approved international flight school for 20 years. During this time he also served as airport manager and has received training and experience in airport planning and development, maintenance, regulations and safety standards. Brent has more than 4,400 accident free flight hours and holds a Commercial Instrument Multi-Engine Certificate and is a Certified Flight Instructor.