



European Hang Gliding & Paragliding Union
www.ehpu.org

To CIVL
31st March 2009

Dear Sirs

We write further to our letter of Thursday 5th February 2009 and thank you for your acknowledgement and for your recent email of 14th March 2009.

We had spent a considerable amount of time at our recent AGM discussing the issue of accidents at competitions and we therefore write to you again to explain our deep concern in more detail. Whilst it is gratifying to know that some initial steps are being taken in regard to hang gliding competition safety, it is our opinion that the problem is more widespread and deep-rooted and will require a major change in CIVL competition philosophy.

Background

Since our previous letter we have seen the passage of the World PG Championships in Mexico. Whilst we wish to congratulate the winning team from the Czech Republic, and World Champion pilot Andy Aebi, we note that once again there was a high profile death which causes us great concern. Taken together with the large number of emergency parachute deployments, and several severe injuries, this adds to what we believe is a continuing safety problem in the top-level competitions in both HG and PG.

We note that HG and PG competitions have evolved to the point that our competitors' aims are now almost solely about speed, and this has insidiously led to what we consider to be dangerous developments in glider design, in both sports. The fact that Paragliders are the slowest flying aircraft, yet modern competitions are all about seeing how fast they can go is something of a paradox. We also note that ours is one of the few remaining so-called "dangerous sports" where death is a regular occurrence at top-level events. It suggests that the time to act has arrived, because our present situation just cannot continue in the simple hope that no more will die.

Our Position

The EHPU represents over 80,000 pilots across the European area, and our principal task is in dealing with National and European Governmental bodies to ensure that they all have continued freedom to fly without excessive regulation and within airspace that does not shrink. A tiny percentage of these pilots take part in international level competitions, but they rightly attract the most media interest. Unfortunately because of the unsafe nature of international level competitions in recent years, we nowadays have to worry about the damage that adverse publicity from competition accidents and fatalities may generate, rather than anticipating any favourable publicity arising from FAI competitions.

The question of safety is always on the radar screen of the legislative organisations, and we believe that a body-bag count at the high profile end of our sport could easily result in those freedoms being taken away from us. We also have no desire to see any more families grieving for a lost pilot.

At the EHPU AGM on 28 February 2009, the delegates were impressed by the contributions of Mark Hayman to the XCMag blog (and many of the replies generated) and believe this demonstrates that there is no universal thirst amongst competition pilots for the current situation to continue. In addition, although not formally decided, the Presidents and Executives attending the meeting favoured the view that National Governing Bodies should consider basing support and funding for competitions on visible moves to deal with the safety problem by Competition Governing Bodies, and the Organisers at event level.

Whilst it is not our position to impose rules, we believe it is time to consider a paradigm shift in thinking regarding the stability and safety of the flying equipment in use; imposing restrictions where necessary and employing different task setting philosophies. Whatever is done, we remain confident that the best pilots will still win, but without the expense of deaths and so many near-misses.

We have made our thoughts clear in terms of making a start, namely with sprog setting measurement in HG competitions. We now believe that similar and broader steps must be taken by the whole industry in PG and that the best place to start is with yourselves in CIVL.

Our Request

Our principal request is simple: we invite you to consider undertaking a reform of the entire HG and PG competition scene as regards safety. We accept that it will be necessary to take a completely fresh look at the competition industry, which will not be easy, but in due course we

would be grateful to receive your views and proposals for reducing danger, serious injury and death. Many thanks in advance for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Charlie Jöst President EHPU
Mark Dale General Secretary EHPU

Signed for and on behalf of:

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Cc Max Bishop FAI