

Mike Goulian Aviation Pro Tip of the Month - Situational Awareness by CFII Collin Kociela

The FAA defines situational awareness as the accurate perception and understanding of all the factors and conditions within the four fundamental risk elements that affect safety before, during, and after the flight. To maintain situational awareness, a pilot needs to understand the relative significance of these factors and their future impact on the flight. When a pilot is situationally aware, he or she has an overview of the total operation of that flight. That being said, Cirrus pilots with the Garmin Perspective + inside the Cirrus SR20/22 G6 have incredible technology at their disposal to keep their situational awareness at a high level. There should never be a time we are not absolutely 100% aware what is going on in the moment and what is to come. As aviators, we must always stay situationally aware to operate an aircraft safely.

From the autopilot, using a visual approach, or using the OBS mode on the CDI, there are so many different functions we can use to our advantage to keep us situationally aware. However, situational awareness does not end there. Most of our flying we do is visual especially when acting under visual flight rules (VFR). Many pilots who are new to the glass cockpit tend to focus too much on what's going on inside the cockpit and forget to look outside. This is a huge problem in the general aviation industry. A great aviator is one that can always be thinking of what he or she can do next. For me, I always try to ask myself "What can I do next?" If you are in the mindset of staying ahead of the airplane right from the get-go, it will benefit you throughout the entire flight. For example, recently at Hanscom Field (KBED) there was an incident with an aircraft that lined up with runway 23 instead of the assigned runway 29. This is a simple mistake that can happen to any of us. However, it is a mistake that is easily avoidable by being more prepared and situationally aware of your arrival airport. If the pilot in this scenario would have loaded in a visual approach, set in the OBS for runway 29, verified with ATC, or was even a little ahead of the airplane, this event could have been avoided all together.

Now, here are a few tips we can all follow to help start improving your all-around situational awareness.

1. Use the autopilot to your advantage. It's a great tool when things get busy.
2. Load in a visual approach to your assigned runway if arriving to your airport VFR. This will allow you to see the final approach course of your assigned runway and there will be no questions when arriving to an airport with intersecting runways. If you are a student pilot, feel free to ask your instructor how to do this in the Cirrus!
3. Practice your radio calls! Whether you are a 5,000-hour pilot or a 5-hour pilot, we need to constantly be practicing our radio calls. The more you do this the better chance you have for developing what is called a "pilots' ear" and you will be able to pick up on when ATC is calling you quicker and will be able to respond to ATC in a more efficient manner.