

# Wire Strike? Not In My Backyard...

**A**sk any pilot or crewmember what their biggest hazard to flight would be, and you could expect a few different answers; birds, other aircraft, or weather. What about wires? Pilots and crewmembers are taught the hazards to terrain flight during primary and tactical training. As a rule of thumb, we were told that “all roads have wires”, but that has not prevented countless flight crews coming in contact with wires. As we have reviewed the data over the last 10 years, it is pretty interesting what it tells us about overconfidence and complacency of our flight crews. We need to look at a few things that will help us prevent the next wire strike.

Terrain flight includes appropriate tactical application of low-level, contour, and nap-of-earth (NOE) flight techniques as appropriate, diminishing the enemy’s capability to acquire, track, and engage aircraft. For night vision device (NVD) training, terrain flight is conducted at 200 feet or less above the highest obstacle. Altitude and airspeed restrictions—for NVD flight training—are listed with the description of each mode. There are physical hazards which flight crews must be aware of, which are divided into manmade and natural. Aviators must be proficient in flight navigation map reading, preparation, and terrain interpretation before entering these modes of flight to mitigate wire and other hazards to flight.

## Pre-Mission Planning and Rehearsals:

Pre-mission planning and rehearsals require pilots to anticipate wires associated with all roads, towers, and buildings in open fields. When time and mission allow, reconnaissance of the flight route, regardless of it being an approved established NOE route, is recommended. Review of the data shows that 39 percentage of the wire strikes occurred on an approved NOE route or within designated terrain flight training areas.

## Data Points:

From FY12 thru March of FY21 there were 18 reported wire strike mishaps. Three Class A mishaps with two fatalities, three Class B, five Class C, three Class D and four Class E. Eleven occurred during day operations, five under NVDs and two at dusk. Breakdown by type of aircraft showed nine AH-64s, five H-60s, one CH-47, one H-6, one UH-1 and one UH-72. Six of the mishaps occurred in the FY12 – FY16 timeframe with 12 incidents from FY17 – FY21.

The number of wire strikes doubled in the last five years compared to the previous five years. What caused the increase? A portion of these accidents happened in our own back yard. Are we complacent or over confident



while operating in our local area and we let our guard down?

## Seven Steps for Wire Strike Prevention:

Here are a few tips to assist you in preventing the next wire strike. If these seven simple steps are implemented and followed you can drastically improve your chances of avoiding injury to your flight crews or damaging your aircraft. Think about each of these steps before your next flight.

1. Standard operating procedures (SOP), Training support packages (TSP) and directives.
2. Supervision.
3. Hazard maps.
4. Wire marking.
5. Plan for terrain flight.
6. Maximum crew coordination preparation and execution.
7. Go slow when you go low.

## Summary

Aviators need to remember these mishaps occur due to omission of a thorough hazards review and failure to implement controls to mitigate the risk. The hazard review and control implementation should be a major portion of the pre-mission planning. A dynamic rehearsal should be conducted reflecting the hazards and the controls. Please enforce the standards and you can maximize your team’s ability to avoid the next mishap. Each of us can make a difference. ■

## References:

ATP 3-04.1 Aviation Tactical Employment  
TC 3-04.4 Fundamentals of Flight

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