

Awareness Builds Safety

A Message from the U.S. Parachute Association



Aircraft pilots and parachutists successfully coexist at airports around the country, happily sharing the air and the airports without issue. Close encounters are rare, but usually involve a pilot who is just passing through an area and is unaware that parachute activity is occurring. Fortunately, simply being aware of parachute activity can help pilots avoid any conflict.

Standard parachute operations conduct jumps within a two-nautical-mile radius over the airport from 14,000 MSL to the surface, with parachutes deployed at approximately 3,000-5,000 feet AGL. There are more than 250 active Parachute Jump Areas across America, and you can find out whether your flight path passes through one by using one or more of these readily available tools:

VFR Flight Following

On this service, controllers provide pilots with traffic information concerning aircraft in the vicinity or on intersecting flight paths based on radar-displayed targets. Pilots are then in better positions to take appropriate action if the need arises. By talking to air traffic control, pilots get a better mental picture of the overall air-traffic situation.

To request flight-following services, you first need to know the appropriate ATC frequency. If you're departing from an airport with an operating control tower, ask the tower for the correct frequency to use. At a non-towered airport, contact Flight Service and ask them for the frequency. Alternatively, you can look up your departure airport in the communications section of the Airport Facility Directory (AFD) or other airport directory and find the frequency of the approach-departure control or ARTCC serving that airport.

Sectional Charts

Sectional charts depict parachute jumping areas with the appropriate parachute symbol in the legend. Pilots flying near an area of jump activity should monitor the Common Traffic Advisory Frequency (of the jump airport) to be aware of upcoming jumps and the "jumpers away" calls from the pilots of the jump aircraft. If getting advisories from ATC, they can also advise of jump activity, since the jump aircraft is in communication with ATC during the ascent.

ForeFlight

ForeFlight makes spotting parachute jump areas much easier. You can view parachute jump areas on ForeFlight in the U.S. directly on the aeronautical map. Tap-hold on the yellow PJA circle to view additional information on the parachute jump activity at the airport. Tap "details" in the "add to route" popup to view a PJA's information, including its name, associated airport or aerodrome, upper and lower altitude limits, active hours and more.

NOTAMs

NOTAMs are typically one of the best places to look for active parachute locations. NOTAMs published for jump activities include the location, altitudes and time/duration of the jump.

Parachute operations within or into Class E or G airspace must notify the air traffic control facility with jurisdiction over the airspace no earlier than 24 hours before or no later than one hour before the parachute operation begins. FAR 91.103 states, "each pilot in command shall, before beginning a flight, become familiar with all available information concerning that flight."

Airport/Facility Directories

Skydiving operations with continuous activity may file a permanent notification. These areas are often, but not always, depicted on aeronautical charts with a parachute symbol and are listed in the Airport/Facility Directory. The actual location of parachute symbols on the chart does not represent the precise location of drop zones. The symbol on the chart may be in the only free spot that is clear of other markings. Another reason to make sure you look for these symbols is because the Flight Service Station will not normally identify these permanent notifications during a preflight briefing unless specifically requested to do so.

If unsure, fly around!

Pilots and skydivers need to be alert and follow the rules. It is the responsibility of everyone to watch for and avoid one another. Skydivers freefall at speeds of 120 mph or more, and they are extremely difficult to spot from other aircraft. Unless you are flying into or out of an airport where skydiving is taking place, it is best to avoid overflying such an airport by at least two miles. It's recommended to stay attentive to UNICOM.

More information on how to share the air with skydivers is available by emailing the USPA Government Relations Department at goverlations@uspa.org.