

How to Obtain a Good Weather Briefing

By Joe Greblo

Here are some "tips" on how to get a good weather briefing. The procedures described in this article should complement other available sources of weather information such as local newspapers, National Weather Service radio broadcast weather, and local television weather broadcasts.

The "Anatomy" of a Good Weather Briefing

A good weather briefing starts with developing an awareness of the overall "big picture" before attempting to get a detailed weather briefing. At many locations, you can learn about the big picture by utilizing the simple and readily available weather sources listed above. After developing the big picture, you are ready to telephone the nearest FAA Flight Service Station for a personal weather briefing.

In a telephone book, look under United States Government/Department of Transportation/Federal Aviation Administration? Flight Service Station. Make sure your planned route of flight is worked out as well as your desired flight time and desired flight altitudes before you make the telephone call.

A universal toll-free number for Flight Service Stations (FSS) has been established by the FAA for your use. In areas of the country where this system is operational, you can dial 1 800 WX BRIEF (1-800-992-7433) and you will be switched automatically to the FSS or automated flight service station that serves the area from which you are calling. When you reach the FSS, you will be answered by a briefer. If you are connected to one of the automated FSS's, you will be answered by a recorded announcement which includes the name of the facility, followed by instructions for both touch-tone and rotary dial telephone users. Touch-tone users can elect to talk to a briefer or any of the direct-access services, or can select a menu which identifies those services and the associated access codes for each. The direct-access services available from an automated FSS are recorded weather and aeronautical information . If you are using other than a touch-tone telephone, you will be switched automatically to a briefer who will provide the information desired; or, if requested, can connect you to one of the direct-access services.

So that your preflight briefing can be tailored to your individual needs, give the briefer the following information:

- Your qualifications, e.g., student hang glider pilot, or hang glider pilot
- The type of flight contemplated--VFR (Visual Flight Rules)
- The type of air vehicle--hang glider
- Your departure point--approximate launch location, relative to the nearest general aviation airport
- Your proposed flight route--either local flight within an estimated radius of your departure point or your cross country flight route. For cross country flights, be sure to note intermediate airports or towns along your anticipated route. This will allow the

briefer to give you the most accurate weather information as well as look for any important [NOTAMs/TFRs](#) <[link to NOTAMs page](#)> that might be along your flight route.

- Your anticipated destination
- Your desired flight altitudes
- Your estimated time of departure (ETD)
- Your estimated time flight time

Request that the briefer provide you with a standard weather briefing. Then LISTEN carefully to the briefer and jot down what he has to say. Try to write quickly and abbreviate whenever possible. The briefer will be following procedures and phraseology used by FAA personnel providing flight services. The briefer will advise you of any adverse conditions along your proposed flight route. When a VFR flight is proposed and actual or forecast conditions make VFR flight questionable, the briefer will describe the conditions and may advise you that "VFR flight is not recommended." If this occurs, or if you feel that the weather conditions are clearly beyond your capabilities or that of your glider or equipment, you should consider terminating the briefing. This will free the briefer to handle other incoming calls.

The briefer will summarize weather reports and forecasts. After the conclusion of the briefing, if there is anything that you do not understand about the weather briefing, let the briefer know.. If terminology is used that you don't understand, ask the briefer to explain it. A briefer who talks too fast should be asked to speak more slowly. The amount of detail in your weather briefing will depend upon how complicated the weather situation really is. Remember, if the weather situation really is "iffy," expect--and insist upon--a complete standard briefing. It is your prerogative as a pilot to do so.

Standard Preflight Weather Briefing

At a minimum, your standard briefing will include the following elements in the following order. You may find it helpful to develop a sketch pad or note paper with the following columns or categories:

- **Adverse Conditions**--Significant meteorological and aeronautical information that might influence you to alter your proposed flying location or even cancel your flight entirely (e.g., thunderstorms, icing, turbulence, low ceilings or visibilities, strong winds or wind shear). Expect the briefer to emphasize conditions that he/she thinks are particularly significant, such as thunderstorms, wind shears, or frontal zones.
- **Synopsis**--A brief statement as to the cause of the weather, or a brief overview of the weather in your area.
- **Current Conditions**--When your proposed time of departure is within two (2) hours, a summary of the current weather, including PIREPs (General Aviation Pilot Reports of flying conditions in your area)/

- **En Route Forecast**--Expect the briefer to summarize forecast conditions along your proposed route. There's a good chance that the briefer will be inexperienced with hang glider flight and will give you weather and wind forecasts for a singular altitude he thinks you will be cruising at during your flight. It is useful to request winds at all altitudes up to 12,000 ft., or even 18,000 ft. for cross-country flying in some areas. For cross country flights, it is also a good idea to request an additional Terminal Forecast for any airport along your route that you think would be helpful. Be sure request this information after the briefer completes the standard briefing.
- **Destination Forecast**--The destination forecast for your planned ETA will be provided, including any significant changes within 1 hour before and after your planned time of arrival.
- **Winds Aloft**--The briefer will summarize forecast winds aloft for the proposed route. Temperature information will be provided on request.
- **Notice to Airmen (NOTAMs)**--"Current" NOTAMs pertinent to your proposed route of flight will be provided. However, information of military training routes and military operations areas (MTRs & MOAs) , along with PUBLISHED NOTAMs and Special Notices, must be specifically requested.

Summary

The Standard Preflight Briefing

Your preflight weather briefing by telephone should include:

- Adverse conditions
- Synopsis
- Current conditions, including PIREPs
- En route forecast
- Destination Forecast
- Winds aloft forecast
- NOTAMs

Don't forget--first give the briefer the flight information needed to compile a good briefing; then listen to the briefer. Ask questions if you don't understand or need more information.

Abbreviated Preflight Briefing

Request an Abbreviated Briefing when you need information to supplement mass disseminated data, update a previous briefing, or when you need only one or two specific items. Provide the briefer with appropriate background information, the time you received the previous information, and/or the specific items needed such as updated winds aloft forecast. You should indicate the source of the information already received so that the briefer can limit the briefing to the information that you have not received,

and/or appreciable changes in meteorological conditions since your previous briefing. To the extent possible, the briefer will provide the information in the sequence shown for a Standard Briefing. If you request only one or two specific items, the briefer will advise you if adverse conditions are present or forecast.. Details on these conditions will be provided at your request.

Outlook Briefing

You should request an Outlook Briefing whenever your proposed flight time is six (6) or more hours from the time of the briefing. The briefer will provide available forecast data applicable to the proposed flight. This type of briefing is provided for planning purposes only. You should obtain a Standard Briefing prior to your flying activities in order to obtain such items as current conditions, updated forecasts, winds aloft and NOTAMs.

Conclusion

Determining safe flying conditions is skill required of pilots of every type of aircraft. Like all skills, it must be learned, and for learning to take place, the skill must be practiced. Hopefully, the information above will encourage and allow you to begin to better practice the important skills of determining safe flying conditions, and to develop those skills to the degree necessary to provide you with many years of safe, rewarding, hang gliding flights.