



Guidance on a Safe Return to Free Flying

Scottish Hang Gliding & Paragliding Federation

Introduction

The aim of this document is to equip the free flying community with the information that they may need in order to reach their own decisions about returning to free flying in Scotland, as the Scottish Government's coronavirus restrictions are eased, which will start in a phased manner on 29th May 2020.

The Scottish Hang Gliding and Paragliding Federation (SHPF) exists to represent the sports of hang gliding and paragliding within Scotland. The SHPF represents eight constituent clubs and schools, and is itself a member of the British Hang Gliding and Paragliding Association (BHPA), which represents free flight sports at the UK level. The SHPF is not a regulatory body, and does not seek to create or enforce rules governing free flight. It is, however, a strong proponent of the BHPA-led approach to free flying.

An Easing of Lockdown Restrictions

The response of the Scottish free flying community to the Covid-19 crisis has been exemplary; thank you to everybody who has resisted the frustration and temptation that we have all experienced, and refrained from flying during the lockdown.

As the lockdown restrictions will now be eased from 29th May, many will be wondering how and when they can take to the air once more. The keys to this will be for individuals to take a sensible and measured approach, while keeping within the law and Covid-19 related guidance, following BHPA & SHPF guidance, and bearing in mind the consequences of their actions on the free flying and wider communities.

It cannot be stressed enough that the easing of lockdown does not mean a return to normal. The Scottish Government have made the following points very clear to us:

- Phase 1 of the easing of lockdown should be considered an extension of exercise, not a return to sport.
- You may travel to take part in exercise activities within five miles of your home (broadly) but where possible you are advised to walk or cycle.
- All activity must be consistent with current [Scottish Government guidance on health, physical distancing and hygiene](#).

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- **IMPORTANT: Do not leave your home to undertake exercise or outdoor activity if Scottish Government advice means you should stay at home because you or someone you live with has or has had symptoms of COVID-19, or you are in the most vulnerable category and have been advised to shield from the coronavirus.**
- The Scottish Government is keen to keep a return to exercise and sport rolling forward, but this relies upon us all following the guidance and safeguarding the public and ourselves.

Flying Law

The CAA's position on General Aviation during the lockdown [was published here](#). General Aviation was precluded by the "Stay at Home" order. Once that order is lifted or eased so that pilots can reach launch, **there is no legal obstacle to free flight**, as we understand it. The SHPF have been in liaison with the BHPA on this matter and will update the community if anything changes.

BHPA and Insurance

The BHPA's advice will be updated on its [website](#) and [Facebook page](#). Please bear in mind that some guidance issued by the BHPA relates to England and is not compatible with Phase 1 in Scotland, where tighter restrictions remain in place.

BHPA members' third-party liability insurance has not changed throughout the lockdown period. However, it is vital to remember that your BHPA insurance only covers you if you are adhering to BHPA rules and the law, and 'take reasonable precautions to prevent any occurrence which may give rise to liability'. The advice of the SHPF to its members is that if you fly outwith the guidance offered in this document, with regard to the phases, you *may* find yourself uninsured in the event of an incident.

Communication

The SHPF will also seek to inform members as the situation changes throughout the various phases of lockdown. This will allow pilots to respond rapidly to the changing environment, based on the best information available. The SHPF Facebook page [is here](#) & [website here](#) and the main [Telegram group for Scottish pilots is here](#). Also refer to your Club Facebook channels and social media.

Scottish Government Phased Approach to Easing Lockdown

In late May the Scottish Government announced its plan for [a four-phase approach to releasing lockdown](#). Central to this plan is the fact that if Covid cases go back up, or if individual sports are perceived to be putting the public at risk, we will be moved back into a higher state of lockdown.

The SHPF have worked with the Scottish Government to agree a set of guidelines for the free flying community under the various phases. Phases 2-4 are still under consideration.

Guidance for Phase 1 is as follows:

Yes to: ground handling and flying at sites that you can walk, cycle or drive to broadly within five miles of your home. The First Minister stated on 22 May that five miles will not be a strict limit, but it is a guide.

Tandem flying within the same household only.

No to: cross country flying (landing out), aerobatics, aerotow, winch operations or face-to-face schooling.

Key Risks

The SHPF perceive three main risks in the return to free flying in a Covid-19 environment. They are:

1. Risk of spreading Covid-19.
2. Risk of accident and the impact on both pilot and emergency services.
3. Risk of reputational damage to our sports.

The following tackles these risks in turn.

1. Risk of spreading Covid-19

Until a pilot launches, they are basically a hill walker. Please follow the [Mountaineering Scotland website](#) for excellent advice on accessing the hills in a Covid-19 environment. The following is our guidance on how to get to launch safely and within the government's public health guidelines.

Social Distancing

As we go out ground handling and to flying sites. It will be important to maintain social distancing (2m apart) from other hillwalkers, pilots and the general public. Some things to consider:

- Stay at home if you are showing symptoms of Covid-19 or should be self-isolating from contact with someone suspected to be infected with Covid-19.
- If you fall within a high-risk group, do not risk infection through joining others, even though it is outdoors and with special measures in place.
- Bear in mind that you may be asymptomatic, and act accordingly, maintaining social distancing.
- If, in the later phases, you wish to fly cross country, think about your retrieve. Hitchhiking and public transport are not good options for the time being. Can you

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arrange a private retrieve? Fly an out and return or triangle? Be prepared for a long walk!

- Avoid sites with a high footfall of the general public - so-called 'honeypots'.
- A maximum of eight people can meet from up to two households at any one time. Additionally members of a household should only meet with one other household per day.
- Don't share vehicles or equipment with other pilots.

Health, Safety & Hygiene

- Until better data is available, assume the virus is resilient outdoors and take measures to avoid transmission. Follow [Health Protection Scotland's guidance](#) regarding hand-washing. Be vigilant with hand hygiene when touching surfaces, such as gates, equipment etc. In particular, use gloves or alcohol gel/wipes after touching any surfaces.
- Bring your own food and water out with you, so as to avoid shops. And bear in mind that many public toilets will be closed.
- Follow travel restrictions outlined by the Scottish Government, which can be found on the [ScotGov website](#). (About five miles in phase 1.)

2. Risk of accident and the impact on both pilot and emergency services.

Currency and Risk Management

The following tools are advised for pilots of all levels as they approach their first flight after a long period of lay-off during lockdown.

- Every activity you partake in should be dynamically risk assessed with the key consideration being safety first, particularly your safety and minimising the risk of infection or transmission.
- Low airtime pilots should consider seeking advice from club coaches.
- One or more sessions of ground handling before your first flight would be an excellent idea.
- Thoroughly check your kit, including that your reserve is secure, and conduct comprehensive pre-flight checks.

After a long period of no flying, none of us is current. On launch, ask yourself some hard questions:

- Am I unfamiliar with the site?
- Is the launch difficult, daunting, or unforgiving of mistakes?
- Have others ever been concerned about my attitude, competence, or safety?
- Are the forecast or actual conditions even slightly concerning to me?

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Now more than ever, avoiding an accident is vitally important. Think about your margins. Temper your ambition. Now is not the time to be pushing your limits, nor to be drawn off the hill just because others are flying and you don't want to miss out. If you answered yes to any of the above questions, consider waiting for a better opportunity to fly with more margin for error; perhaps a morning or evening flight off a known local hill.

If you decide to fly, let someone know your intentions, discuss conditions with other pilots (while adhering to all government advice on safe physical separation), use your SPOT or inReach, and fly with others.

The Impact of an Accident on You and Emergency Services

The following advice is issued through consultation with Chris diRollo, Chief Medical Officer of the Dundonnell Mountain Rescue Team.

The pressures and restrictions that Covid-19 place on medical staff and emergency services will have a significant impact on the way you would be rescued and treated in the event of an accident.

It is important to consider some of the following:

- Until there is a vaccine for Covid-19, [emergency services have to wear PPE](#) when attending casualties. This means that helicopters will almost certainly not attend accidents unless life is at risk as crew cannot wear PPE, which is incompatible with their equipment.
- The complications of rescue in a Covid-19 environment mean that rescue may take a lot longer than normal.
- Mountain Rescue Teams (MRTs) are currently advised not to administer airway adjuncts or CPR.
- Pressure on frontline medical staff may affect the way in which you are treated in hospital.
- Remember that in the Covid 19 environment, a rescue is likely to place unique stress on the members of all agencies involved. The [Scottish Mountain Rescue website](#) is a good source of information about the challenges of mountain rescues in the Covid-19 environment.

“The single biggest issue in rescuing a casualty from an outdoor setting during the current situation is the amount of personnel involved. All rescues are multi-agency, usually involving the Police, Mountain Rescue, Ambulance Service, Coastguard SAR and possibly the Air Ambulance and Fire Service. A casualty that is Covid positive could expose all those people involved and their families that they return to. All rescue personnel will assume that a casualty is positive, so will require full PPE.” Chris DiRollo, Dundonnell MRT

3. Risk of reputational damage to our sports.

Landowner Relationships

Remember that our behaviour during the Covid-19 crisis may affect our relationship with landowners for a long time into the future. This will be particularly relevant where special arrangements and vehicular access has been negotiated historically. The key will be to communicate with farmers and other landowners as appropriate. Regional Clubs will know which sites require conversations with particular landowners.

Outdoor Access

While the Scottish Outdoor Access Code remains in place, please be aware that the access that you have enjoyed across private land previously may not be automatically granted during this crisis. [Please read the guidance issued for access during the pandemic.](#)

Please be aware that Forest and Land Scotland (formerly Forestry Commission) car parks were closed under the lockdown. This may change - keep an eye on the [Forest & Land Scotland website here.](#)

Public Perception, PR and Press

Also be aware that, even after flying is legal again, public perception towards pilots may vary. Think about how you would react in the event of being challenged. Also think before you post flying photos or videos on social media. It only takes one person to copy your images to the wrong place and we could have a public relations problem, which could negatively affect us all.

SHPF Support

In the event of an incident or if you encounter a problem that you think could have repercussions on the free flying community, please contact us. We are here to help if we can - committee@shpf.co.uk