

How The Air Show Community Views The Sacred 60 Minutes

The International Council of Air Shows (“ICAS”) is a trade and professional association of air show performers, organizers, vendors and support-service providers. Among other things, ICAS promotes safety initiatives across the air show industry. According to ICAS, “the ‘Sacred Sixty Minutes’ is an hour-long period before a performer flies when he/she should be left alone to prepare himself/herself for the rigors of low-level aerobatic flying.”

ICAS says that it has analyzed past accidents, incidents, near-misses, and similar events and found that distractions during the time immediately before a pilot flies have been a contributing factor in those events. Accordingly, “ICAS has advocated that the entire air show community commit itself to eliminating all unnecessary interaction with performers during those crucial 60 minutes immediately preceding a performance.”

The organization has taken specific steps to help create and maintain the Sacred 60. ICAS lobbied the FAA to revise its guidance for its inspectors supervising air shows to encourage them to respect the Sacred 60 and avoid distracting pilots during that time. Air show media chiefs brief media about the Sacred 60 and generally do not schedule media access to performers if it would interfere with preflight focus. The concept includes show organizers, flightline personnel and a performer’s own ramp crew. “It is not just a distraction when somebody else distracts a pilot with something unimportant just before he performs. It’s just as much of a problem if we ourselves distract the performer with something that we consider to be important.”

Even the air boss falls within the admonition. It’s not uncommon for air show schedules to change at the last minute, whether for performer cancellations, incoming weather or otherwise. Air bosses can and do get on the radio and ask performers to fly sooner than scheduled. But air bosses are increasingly sensitive to schedule changes that might compromise the Sacred 60 of a pilot. “A pilot who expects to perform at 2:00 p.m. cannot be told at 12:30 that the schedule has changed and he will be expected to fly at 12:45. There are few pilots who would simply say no to this request, but the ‘Sacred 60 Minutes’ should still be observed, especially under these types of circumstances.”

ICAS places much of the responsibility for creating the Sacred 60 on the performer him or herself. “If you don’t take some initiative to separate yourself from fans, other pilots, sponsors and/or the media while you prepare to fly, those who might distract you will be much more likely to do so. Get in your rental car. Walk out onto the ramp where there are fewer people. Put headphones on and listen to music. Give your friends, colleagues and fans some non-verbal cues and hints that you are preparing to perform and need to be left alone.”



Pictured above, an aerobatic pilot walks through his upcoming routine. While your next flight may not have as many twists and turns, putting aside external distractions and focusing is every bit as important for its success.