

# DECELERATING

As we wrote in a sidebar accompanying our January 2006 article on turnbacks, “Regardless of how you answer the question of whether to turn back to the runway after an engine failure, the key factor in surviving the coming impact is and always has been how the airplane’s kinetic energy is dissipated in a crash landing. If that energy dissipates over a sufficient amount of time, there is a strong likelihood the airplane’s occupants will survive.

“Dissipating that energy—and surviving a crash landing—depends on two basic factors: the angle at which the aircraft impacts the ground and its speed. Of course, this presumes all other variables—like the fuselage’s ability to absorb the impact forces, seat attachment points and reliability of the belts and harnesses worn by the airplane’s occupants—are equivalent....

“So the question, ‘Should I turn back or land essentially straight ahead?’ is the wrong question to ask. Instead, you should be asking, ‘Which option affords the greatest likelihood of survival for me and my passengers?’”

