

Safety Or Utility?

Conceptually, we might think about the combined effects of safety and utility on the risk to which we're exposed as being represented by a curve expressing the safety results achieved for a given level of utility. Consider the chart at right and the three "curves."

First of all, the vertical axis represents the fatal accident rate and the horizontal axis the level of utility achieved. Obviously, we could have perfect safety by choosing "zero" utility and just crouch in that lower left corner in the fetal position. That isn't why we own airplanes, however, or at least it's not why I own one.

With pilot training and capability left out of the equation for a moment, each aircraft's "utility" is a composite of its basic performance (speed, range, payload, etc.) coupled with installed technology. These features provide it with a flatter safety-utility curve. This is shown for the Cirrus fleet when compared to the steeper, less-safe curve representing all of general aviation. This curve may also explain the current Cirrus fleet accident record, which is worse than with other high-performance GA aircraft as owners choose to expand utility without emphasizing improved safety through training in higher order pilot skills.

The bottom curve is the more interesting one, since it conceptually explains how COPA members can enjoy both increased safety and utility simultaneously through improved training, especially in skills such as risk management.

