

**Habits** have a tremendous influence on Safety. A habit is simply the way we do things without even thinking, at least without using our conscious mind. We all have them and they guide the way we do certain things. Norms (Issue July/August 2015 or #8: DOM under articles on the System Safety Services website) are the big brother of habit but are simply a habit that a group of individuals have and follow. Like norms, habits can be positive, negative or neutral and like negative norms, a negative habit

can kill. A habit that came very close to killing five pilots can be found on our website [www.system-safety.com](http://www.system-safety.com) under Safety videos: "Too Many Cooks." The case study #2 and video trailer will provide the full details of how a maintenance error leads to an unnecessary ditching of a fully functioning helicopter into the ocean. When an erroneous engine out warning horn sounded, the low time pilot flying immediately lowered the collective and "rolled off the throttle" as he was in the habit of doing on all the practice auto-rotations on piston powered helicopters he had been trained on. As he autorotated down to the cold ocean below he raised the collective to test if the engine had actually failed. He noted the rotor rpm decreasing because the engine was at idle as he had set it but was unaware of having done so. Fortunately they and the helicopter were plucked from the water by a heli-logging helicopter before hypothermia set in and an inspection of the salt water soaked machine revealed a loose N1 cannon plug had fallen off the N1 tack generator causing the erroneous engine out warning.



Remember that habits are things that we do without thinking and in times of high stress, which he was, we will revert to habit.

Another common habit that can turn deadly is the habit of turning away from the skid on a wet or icy road. This is the normal habit of turning the wheels in the direction you want to go but in a skid, will result in a loss of control with potential deadly consequences. You may know to turn the wheels in the direction of the skid in order to stop the skid and maintain control but in that moment of “high stress” you very likely will revert to habit with likely undesirable consequences. Habits at work enable you to become “skilled” at completing routine tasks quicker and easier. This is not a problem as long as nothing different takes place with the task as complacency (Issue June 2016 or #15 under website Articles: DOM) can cause you to miss the difference that you were not expecting.

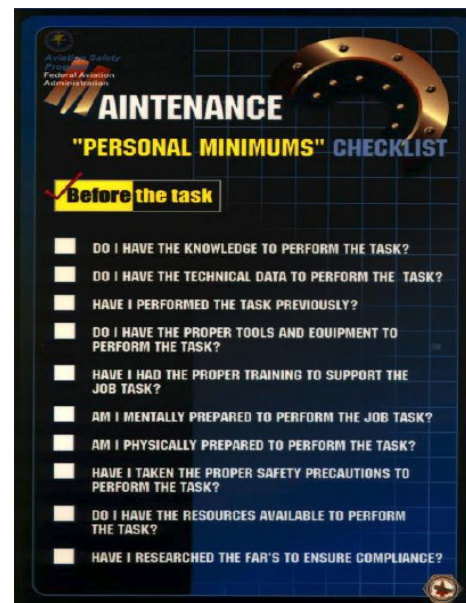
Thus one should get in the **habit** of just taking a “moment for Safety” and question what you are doing. OK so I’ve done this a hundred times without a problem but what could possibly go wrong? Is the way I have habitually been doing this task enhancing or detracting from an established Safety Standard? Is there a Safer way to do it? Am I “mentally prepared” for all possibilities for something to go wrong?

Studies show that it takes an average of 21 consistent repetitions for a habit to form. I say that it takes motivation (a reason you believe in) to even begin the forming of a positive habit or the releasing of a negative one.

I have often been asked: “what is the number one reason for us humans to make a human error that we certainly don’t intend to make? I believe it is simply that we all have this inner belief that it will never happen to me. To others perhaps, but not to me. The answer to this is to remember one simple word. **YET**. YET stands for: if you’re human then **You’re Eligible Too**. This means that you haven’t made a particular error, YET. Habits simply make errors easier to occur because you are able to do them “without thinking.”

Thus we need a new habit to control our habits and that is questioning our habits. Get in the habit of taking that so very important moment for Safety to question the task you are about to do.

The FAA, a number of years ago came out with an excellent set of posters titled Maintenance “Personal Minimums” Checklist for before the task and after the task.. I have attached a copy of each but I



was unable to find out if they are still available.

Finally I have a personal habit that I'd ask you to consider developing into a habit for you. I hope that I've provided sufficient motivation for you to start and it is up to you to do it the 21 consecutive times for it to become a habit. The following was in the first article that I wrote for DOM back in the September/October 2014 issue. The choice, as always, is yours but it is an excellent way to illustrate that you also are serious about Safety.

### **Why Safety Deserves a Capital "S"**

Have you ever noticed that the names of people, cities, countries, months, days and important places all start with a capital letter? Titles, car types and most abbreviations for words are honoured with a capital. In short, we tend to use capitals to denote important words.

So why not a big, for all to see, capital "S" for Safety? The only logical answer I can find is that it is not traditional to do so. If that is the case then it's time we updated the tradition.

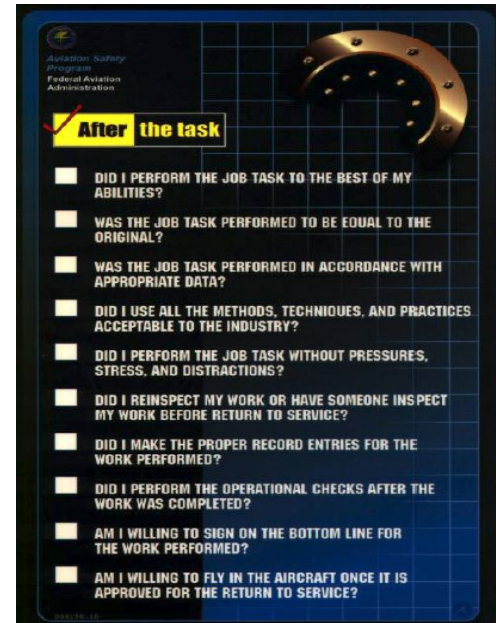
Why shouldn't Safety have a capital "S"? It has never been so important as now with so many lives depending on it. I've given it a capital for years except when Microsoft Word drops it back down to a small "s" when my back is turned.

I can remember, not that many years ago, when Safety was for wimps or mama's boys as they were called back then, because real men just used their common sense to survive and didn't need silly Safety rules to dictate what they could or couldn't do. Sure, some of those without common sense were killed, but it was survival of the fittest and good for the gene pool. Then, organizations like CCOHS (Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety) and OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration), began to make Safety rules. Please note that these Safety organizations were given capital letters, but not Safety unless part of the title.

The FAA, CAA, ICAO, TC, etc. also got into the Safety business and with regulations and rules untold thousands of lives have been saved, but no one thought to recognize Safety for the importance in Saving lives that it deserves.

I believe that today, Safety is an important factor in a person's life.

Today, they won't allow you to take a child home from the hospital without a Safety approved car seat.



Lee Iacocca thought he was right at the time, in 1971, when he said, “*safety doesn’t sell cars*” and refused to authorize a \$1.00 per car fix to the Pinto gas tank because it would be cheaper to pay out for the odd person who would get burned in a rear end car crash. (Over 500 would suffer that fate with 27 being fatal in Pinto rear end collision accidents)

But he was so very wrong when people realized that the car was unsafe and shortly thereafter they went out of production (1980) even with the fix. So, the Pinto earned a capital, but not Safety that today sees cars with shoulder harness seatbelts, airbags, collapsible steering wheel, crumple zones, reinforced doors that don’t jam, etc., etc.

Today, Safety does sell and is expected. Without Safety, no company will remain in the aviation business for long. Thus, it is time that Safety receives the importance and respect it deserves. Safety deserves a capital “S”. I, for one, will spell it that way and if you are serious about Safety:

I urge you to do the same.