

OPERATING IN MVFR

by Harry Kraemer

It's Saturday morning, the day of the area's biggest fly in breakfast. A few of your flying buddies and you have made plans to fly in. A call to Flight Service reveals that the weather enroute is 3,000 scattered and three miles visibility with haze.

You say to yourself, "three miles is legal VFR, after all. We are going to go!" This is true, three miles is legal VFR, but perhaps a better point to consider is, "it is legal, but how safe is it?" Marginal VFR is defined as visibility of three to five miles.

Since the FAA allows a VFR pilot to fly within the three to five mile limitation, here are a few suggestions all aviators can follow to improve safety while in MVFR conditions.

The FAA has a voluntary pilot safety program called "Operation Lights On" to enhance the see-and-avoid concept. This program, set out in the Airman's Information Manual, encourages pilots to turn on their anticollision lights any time the engine(s) are running. Use of these lights is particularly encouraged when operating on airport surfaces during periods of reduced visibility. It also recommends that pilots turn on their landing lights when operating below 10,000 feet, when operating within 10 miles of any airport, or in conditions of reduced visibility. It is



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surprising how many airplanes are seen only because the landing lights were seen first.

How many times, while operating within 3,000 feet of the surface, do pilots fly at altitudes of 2,000 or 2,500 feet? Chances of a midair collision can be significantly reduced if altitudes of 2,250 or 2,300 are chosen to fly. The majority of pilots do not fly at odd altitudes such as these.

If you are flying in an area that is covered by radar, why not take advantage of the services ATC offers? Traffic Advisories are offered on a work load permitting basis. ATC can give VFR pilots traffic information referencing the 12 hour clock, 12 being the nose of the aircraft, three being the right wing tip, etc. However, this does not in any way relieve the pilot of his own vigilant scan of the area.

As pilots flying on a three dimensional level, we must be actually alert to others in surrounding airspace, particularly in MVFR conditions. Making the aircraft more visible will help all aviators be safer. Good luck and friendly skies to you! 

