

# Avoiding A Runway Incursion

*Extra vigilance by pilots and controllers during IFR operations is necessary to avoid disaster.*

By Harry Kraemer

I WAS FLYING OUR COMPANY airplane from Colorado Springs, Colorado back to the East Coast. Severe thunderstorms blanketed the Mid-West. As we approached the line of weather, it became obvious there was no way we were either going to top it or go around it. Penetrating the line was out of the question. We elected to stop in St. Louis, but still had to beat the advancing line of storms to the airport. To make matters worse, a lot of other flights decided to divert there and the controllers were busy trying to accommodate the sudden rush of traffic to the airport before the weather arrived. (It was already 4,000 overcast and two miles visibility in moderate rain.)

The controllers were asking everyone to keep their speed up as much as possible on the approach. On short final, I noticed standing water on the runway. I landed faster than normal due to gusty crosswinds. The tower told us to make the next left, just as we were going past a taxiway. (I was too busy at the moment to talk to the controller.) The next left following the taxiway turned out to be an active runway. I didn't think the controller intended for us to turn onto a runway. It was then I noticed an airliner about to touch down on the crossing runway.

We got the airplane stopped before the crossing runway and the controller (in a very excited voice) told us not to turn there. Instead, we were cleared to make a one-eighty on the runway and back-taxi to the turn-off he had originally intended for us to use.

In the rush to get everyone down and off the runway, the controller had failed to specify which left turn we were supposed to make, nor did he tell us to hold short of the intersecting runway. Fortunately, everything ended well, but the situation could have resulted in what the FAA likes to refer to as a "runway

incursion." This is defined as "any occurrence at an airport involving an aircraft, vehicle, person, or object on the ground that creates a collision hazard or results in loss of separation with an aircraft taking off or intending to take off, land or intending to land."

The bad news is runway incursions are on the rise. In 1997, there were more than 300 occurrences. Runway incursions usually result from a clearance misunderstanding, communications problems or a loss of positional awareness.

AIM Paragraph 4-3-20 states that after landing you should "exit the runway without delay at the first available taxiway or on a taxiway as instructed by ATC." While this makes perfectly good sense, there are traps for the unwary pilot. The AIM goes on to say, "In the absence of ATC instructions the pilot is expected to taxi clear of the landing runway even if that requires the aircraft to protrude into or cross another taxiway, runway or ramp area."

## Reduced Visibility Problems

In the situation I encountered, the controller probably believed I would be able to turn at the taxiway. The weather during landing could have created a visual perception problem. The top half of the aircraft I fly is gray and the bottom half is white. I was landing on a

concrete runway in moderate rain at dusk. Perhaps the controller misjudged my speed as a result.

The entire situation underscores the need to maintain awareness when landing at an airport where more than one approach and runway are in use. Be especially cautious during reduced visibility. Don't hesitate to ask if you have doubts about where to turn or don't understand a clearance.

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## Don't Set Yourself Up

Many runway incursions result from a pilot or crew accepting a clearance to "land and hold short" (LAHSO) of an intersecting runway without really knowing whether they can stop in time. A LAHSO clearance can be a real "gotcha," since (like any other clearance) you must comply with the land and hold short instructions once you've accepted them. Failure to comply with a LAHSO clearance can result in a violation, not to mention it can ruin your whole day. Don't accept this clearance unless you're certain you can make it, especially in reduced visibility situations.



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