FPVL
FEDERAÇÃO PORTUGUESA DE VOO LIVRE

INSTITUTIONAL NOTICE ON SAFETY

Free flight in Portugal | Coastal flying safety

KEY MESSAGE

Coastal ridge soaring is not a simpler form of mountain flying. As Portugal grows increasingly popular as a premier destination for international pilots, a recent rise in foreign pilot accidents highlights a critical lack of familiarity with coastal flying conditions: shifting tides, rapid weather changes, wind acceleration, and a shortage of landing alternatives.
Safe free flight requires continuous assessment, strict safety margins, and local knowledge.

Recipients

FAI / CIVL • National aeroclubs and federations • Clubs and schools • Visiting pilots
FPVL members • Media and specialist press

INSTITUTIONAL SAFETY NOTICE

The Portuguese Free Flight Federation (FPVL) addresses the national and international community of paraglider and hang glider pilots to reinforce accident prevention and the need to understand the specific characteristics of flying in Portugal, particularly in coastal areas. This notice is intended to support prudent decision-making. It does not replace applicable legislation, official aeronautical information, local rules, or the pilot's on-site assessment.

1. Why coastal flying requires a specific approach

Coastal ridge soaring depends on the interaction between the wind and the terrain. Unlike many mountain environments, where thermal activity may dominate, lift along a cliff can deteriorate rapidly when the wind decreases, changes direction, becomes irregular, or no longer strikes the terrain at a suitable angle.

- Wind strength and direction: a small change in wind speed or direction can shift or eliminate the usable lift band.
- Topography: headlands, coves, projections, buildings, and breaks in the cliff line can accelerate, deflect, or cause turbulence in the airflow.
- Rotor and wind gradient: the area downwind of the ridge may contain severe turbulence; rotor strength and extent are not constant.
- Ocean and tides: a beach visible at take-off may become narrow, cut off, or unusable during the flight.
- Operational pressure: heavy traffic, overconfidence, copying local pilots, and the desire to remain airborne reduce safety margins.

GOLDEN RULE

If local pilots remain on the ground, assume there is a relevant operational reason.
Stop, ask, and reassess.

2. Assessment of conditions and the site

1. Check the forecast and observe the actual conditions before laying out the equipment: mean wind speed, gusts, direction, trend, cloud, visibility, sea state, and tidal evolution.
2. Identify wind acceleration near headlands and points, sheltered areas, convergence zones, rotors, obstacles, power lines, buildings, and areas occupied by the public.
3. Before take-off, define a primary landing area and genuinely usable alternatives. A beach is not automatically a safe landing area.
4. Set personal no-go criteria: wind outside the suitable range for the pilot and equipment, excessive gusts, no land-based alternative, incompatible traffic levels, or uncertainty regarding the airspace.
5. Reassess throughout the flight. The correct decision may be to land early rather than wait for obvious deterioration.

Signs of worsening conditions requiring early action

- Changes in groundspeed, such as increasing difficulty making progress into wind.
- Increasing whitecaps at sea, dust or vegetation indicating gusts, or windsocks showing inconsistent wind conditions.
- Turbulence, collapses, abrupt wing movements, changes in brake pressure, or unexpected drift near the ridge.

- The beach disappearing, surf encroaching on the dry strip, access routes being cut off, or people gathering in the landing area.

3. Separation, right-of-way, and traffic patterns

Right-of-way rules do not remove the duty to avoid collision. Always maintain sufficient margin to correct errors, manage gusts, and accommodate less experienced pilots.

- When ridge soaring, the pilot with the ridge on the right has right of way; the pilot with the ridge on the left must give way by moving away from the terrain in good time.
- Overtake only when sufficient separation exists and on the outside, away from the cliff. Never trap another pilot between your aircraft and the terrain.
- Before reversing direction, check the traffic and turn towards the clear side, normally seaward, without crossing the flight path of other aircraft.
- Avoid flying directly above, below, or in the wake of another glider. Allow for wake turbulence and the possibility of a sudden loss of height.
- Do not remain in congested areas. If separation is no longer comfortable, leave the lift band and land.

OPERATIONAL PRINCIPLE

Having right of way does not justify maintaining a collision course. The objective is to prevent conflict, not to prove who is right.

4. Top landing and rotor

Top landing combines proximity to the ground, wind gradient, traffic, obstacles, and possible rotor. It must be treated as an advanced manoeuvre, not as a routine recovery procedure.

- Do not attempt a top landing unless you know the area, circuit, touchdown point, escape options, and likely extent of the rotor.
- Fly a stabilised approach with an adequate speed margin and a clear go-around decision point. Avoid tight manoeuvres and late corrections close to the ground.
- Never deliberately cross behind the ridge at low height to search for a landing area.
- When the beach is the planned alternative, confirm in advance that it remains available, accessible, and clear of the surf. If no option is safe, do not take off.

5. Water, tides, equipment, and rescue

A water landing always creates a risk of line entanglement, interference from the glider and harness while swimming, wave impact, and difficult access for rescue teams. Planning must always prioritise a safe landing option on land.

- Consider carrying a suitable line cutter, accessible with either hand and secured so that it cannot be lost during an emergency.
- Consider appropriate personal flotation equipment when justified by the risk assessment. Its use does not make a water landing an acceptable option.
- Avoid flying alone. Inform someone on the ground of the location, route, expected schedule, contact details, and procedure in the event of a delay.
- Carry a water-protected telephone, a radio compatible with local procedures, and identification. Confirm that mobile coverage is actually available.

- In an emergency, call 112 and provide the location, number of casualties, type and colour of the glider, whether the person is in the water, sea conditions, and the last observed position.
- Do not enter the sea to attempt an improvised rescue if this could create a second casualty. Alert the specialist rescue services and maintain visual contact whenever possible.

6. Human factors and pilot preparation

- Recent experience: do not confuse total flight hours with current proficiency in cliff flying, heavy traffic, strong wind, or top landing.
- Suitable equipment: comply with the certified weight range and operating limitations, and verify the condition of the glider, harness, helmet, reserve parachute, and instruments.
- Group flying: define the briefing, radio channel, leadership, suspension criteria, and meeting point. Avoid pressure to keep up with more experienced pilots.
- Fatigue and exposure: cold, dehydration, sun glare, stress, and prolonged flight impair perception and decision-making.
- Public and environment: protect third parties and respect access routes, property, sensitive areas, nesting sites, environmental restrictions, and instructions issued by local authorities.
- Reporting and learning: report incidents and near misses through the applicable channels to support prevention and improve local briefings.

7. Airspace, NOTAM, and operational coordination

Before flying, consult the current official aeronautical information, including airspace structure, prohibited, restricted, or danger areas, and applicable NOTAM. NAV Portugal's AIS service is available at:

https://ais.nav.pt/pt/avisos-de-navegacao/

- Confirm with the relevant local club, school, or authority whether a specific procedure applies to coordination or area activation and deactivation.
- Do not assume that every site has a dedicated NOTAM, the same contact details, the same operating hours, or the same operational arrangements.
- Where an activation and deactivation procedure exists, comply with it in full and confirm the end of operations immediately after the final flight.
- Where no dedicated NOTAM exists, follow the guidance issued by the competent authorities regarding information to other traffic and coordination with search and rescue services.
- Operational telephone contacts must be verified before publication and again on the day of operations. Do not use numbers taken from old copies or informal messages.

LIABILITY NOTICE

This notice does not replace aviation regulations, AIS publications, NOTAM, site operating conditions, or instructions issued by the competent authorities.

8. Qualifications, documentation, and insurance

Before travelling, the pilot must confirm that their qualifications and documents are recognised and valid for the intended operation in Portugal. The pilot must also hold insurance appropriate to the discipline, territory, type of flight, and, where applicable, the passenger.

- Visiting pilots should contact a club or school in the region in advance to clarify equivalences, restrictions, and local conditions.
- Check validity dates, territorial scope, limits, exclusions, and third-party liability cover. Do not assume that insurance issued in another country automatically covers Portugal or every discipline.
- For tandem flying, specifically confirm the required qualification, purpose of the operation, passenger cover, and any additional applicable requirements.

9. Pre-flight checklist

✓	AREA	CONFIRMATION
☐	**WEATHER**	Forecast checked; actual wind and trend assessed; gusts and direction compatible.
☐	**TIDE AND LANDING AREAS**	Tide checked; primary and alternative landing areas accessible; surf and public presence assessed.
☐	**LOCAL AEROLOGY**	Rotor, gradient, acceleration zones, lee-side areas, headlands, coves, and obstacles identified.
☐	**TRAFFIC**	Right-of-way rules and local circuit understood; traffic density acceptable; plan defined for leaving the lift band.
☐	**AIRSPACE**	AIS and NOTAM checked; coordination/activation confirmed where applicable.
☐	**PILOT AND EQUIPMENT**	Qualifications, recent experience, physical condition, glider, harness, reserve parachute, helmet, and communications checked.
☐	**EMERGENCY**	Person on the ground informed; 112; shareable location; protected telephone; accessible line cutter; any required personal flotation equipment.
☐	**DECISION**	No-go and early-landing criteria defined. No relevant uncertainty remains unresolved.

10. In case of doubt or changing conditions

- Do not take off, or land while sufficient margin remains.
- Move away from congested areas, rotors, and flight paths with no safe escape route.
- Ask local pilots, a club, or a school for information, while retaining responsibility for your own decision.
- If an incident or accident occurs, secure the area, call 112, provide coordinates, and preserve information useful for rescue and subsequent analysis.

THE DECISION NOT TO TAKE OFF IS A MARK OF GOOD AIRMANSHIP

Safety, local knowledge, operational discipline, and respect for airspace are essential conditions for responsible free flight.

11. Call for international dissemination

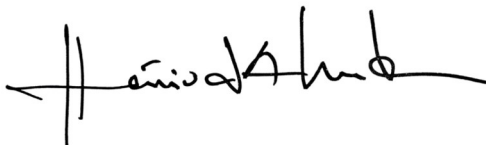
FPVL asks the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale (FAI), CIVL, counterpart federations, its members, clubs, schools, and specialist media organisations to circulate these recommendations among pilots and visitors planning to fly in Portugal.

12. Institutional references

- **NAV Portugal, AIS and navigation warnings: https://ais.nav.pt/pt/avisos-de-navegacao/**
- **ANAC, Regulation No. 191/2009, operation of free flight aircraft: Consult the current consolidated version on the ANAC website.**
- **Decree-Law No. 238/2004, use of civil free flight and ultralight aircraft: Consult the applicable consolidated text.**
- **FAI / CIVL, documents and safety guidance: https://www.fai.org/page/sporting-code-section-7**
- **FPVL, information for pilots, clubs, schools, licences, and insurance: https://fpvl.pt**

Sports greetings.

Happy flying!



Eugénio de Almeida e Silva
President of the Portuguese Free Flight Federation