INSTITUTIONAL SAFETY NOTICE

Free flight in Portugal | Coastal flying safety

KEY MESSAGE
Coastal ridge soaring is not a simpler version of mountain flying. As Portugal becomes an increasingly popular destination for international pilots, the recent rise in accidents involving visiting pilots highlights a critical lack of familiarity with coastal flying conditions: changing tides, rapidly evolving weather, wind acceleration and limited landing alternatives.

Safe free flight requires continuous assessment, strict safety margins and local knowledge.

ADDRESSEES

FAI / CIVL • International 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 paragliding and hang-gliding community to reinforce accident prevention and the need to understand the particular features of flying in Portugal, especially in coastal areas. This notice is intended to support prudent decisions and does not replace 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 close to a cliff can deteriorate rapidly when the wind decreases, changes direction, becomes irregular or, for other reasons, no longer meets the terrain effectively.

- Wind and aspect: a small change in strength or direction can shift or eliminate the usable lift band.
- Topography: headlands, coves, projections, buildings and breaks in the cliff may accelerate, deflect or make the airflow turbulent.
- Rotor and gradient: the lee side of the crest may contain severe turbulence; the strength and extent of the rotor are not constant.
- Ocean and tides: a beach visible at take-off may become reduced, 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 sound operational reason.
Stop, ask and reassess.

2. Assessment of the conditions and site

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

Signs of deterioration requiring early action

- Changes in groundspeed, such as increasing difficulty making progress into wind.
- Increasing white horses at sea, dust or vegetation indicating gusts, or windsocks giving inconsistent indications.

• Turbulence, collapses, abrupt wing movements, changes in control pressure or unexpected drift close to the crest.
• 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 a collision. Always maintain a margin that allows for correcting errors, dealing with gusts and accommodating less experienced pilots.
• In 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/or the terrain.
• Initiate turns only after checking traffic and turn towards the clear side, normally seaward, without crossing another aircraft's flight path.
• Avoid flying directly above, below or in the wake of another wing. 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 authorise 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 normal recovery procedure.
• Do not attempt a top landing without knowing the area, circuit, touchdown point, escape options and likely extent of the rotor.
• Fly a stabilised approach with a speed margin and a clear go-around decision. Avoid tight manoeuvres and late corrections close to the ground.
• Never deliberately cross behind the crest at low height to look for a landing area.
• If the beach is the planned alternative, confirm beforehand that it remains available, accessible and clear of the surf. If there is no safe option, do not take off.

5. Water, tides, equipment and rescue

A water landing always creates risks from entanglement in lines, interference from the wing and harness while swimming, wave impact and difficult access for rescue teams. Planning must always prioritise a safe onshore alternative.
• Consider an appropriate line cutter, accessible with either hand and secured so it cannot be lost during an emergency.
• Consider suitable flotation equipment where justified by the risk assessment. Its use does not make a water landing an acceptable option.

• Avoid flying alone. Tell someone ashore the site, route, expected time, contact details and what to do if you are overdue.
• Carry a waterproofed telephone, a radio compatible with local procedures and identification. Confirm that mobile coverage actually exists.
• In an emergency, call 112 and give the location, number of casualties, type and colour of wing, whether the person is in the water, sea conditions and last observed position.
• Do not enter the sea for an improvised rescue if this could create a second casualty. Call the specialist rescue services and maintain visual contact where possible.

6. Human factors and pilot preparation

• Recent experience: do not confuse total flying hours with current proficiency in cliff flying, heavy traffic, strong wind or top landing.
• Suitable equipment: respect the weight range, limitations and condition of the wing, harness, helmet, reserve and instruments.
• Group flying: agree a briefing, radio channel, leadership, suspension criteria and meeting point. Avoid pressure to follow more experienced pilots.
• Fatigue and exposure: cold, dehydration, sun glare, stress and prolonged flight degrade perception and decision-making.
• Public and environment: protect third parties and respect access, property, sensitive areas, nesting sites, environmental restrictions and instructions from 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 organisation whether a specific coordination, activation or deactivation procedure applies.
• Do not assume that every site has a dedicated NOTAM, the same contact, the same operating hours or the same operating arrangements.
• Where an activation and deactivation procedure exists, comply with it fully and confirm closure of the activity immediately after the final flight.
• Where no dedicated NOTAM exists, follow the competent authorities’ guidance on advising other traffic and coordinating with search and rescue services.
• Operational telephone contacts must be verified before publication and again on the day. Do not use numbers taken from old copies or informal messages.

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

8. Qualifications, documentation and insurance

Before travelling, pilots must confirm that their qualifications and documents are recognised and valid for the intended operation in Portugal. Pilots 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 equivalence, restrictions and local conditions.

• Check expiry 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 qualification, purpose of the operation, passenger cover and any additional applicable requirements.

9. Pre-take-off checklist

✓	AREA	CONFIRMATION
☐	**WEATHER**	Forecast checked; actual wind and trend assessed; gusts and direction compatible.
☐	**TIDE AND LANDINGS**	Tide checked; main landing and alternatives accessible; surf and public assessed.
☐	**LOCAL AEROLOGY**	Rotor, gradient, acceleration, lee areas, headlands, coves and obstacles identified.
☐	**TRAFFIC**	Right of way and local circuit understood; density compatible; plan for leaving the lift band defined.
☐	**AIRSPACE**	AIS and NOTAM checked; coordination/activation confirmed where applicable.
☐	**PILOT AND EQUIPMENT**	Qualification, recent experience, physical condition, wing, harness, reserve, helmet and communications checked.
☐	**EMERGENCY**	Person ashore informed; 112; shareable location; protected telephone; accessible line cutter; any personal flotation equipment.
☐	**DECISION**	No-go and early-landing criteria defined. No material uncertainty remains unresolved.

10. If in doubt or if conditions change

• Do not take off, or land while an adequate margin still exists.

• Move away from congested areas, rotors and flight paths with no escape option.

• Ask local pilots, a club or school for information, but retain responsibility for your own decision.
• If an incident or accident occurs, secure the area, call 112, provide coordinates and preserve useful information for rescue and subsequent analysis.

THE DECISION NOT TO TAKE OFF IS A GOOD AIRMANSHIP DECISION
Safety, local knowledge, operational discipline and respect for airspace are essential conditions for responsible free flight.

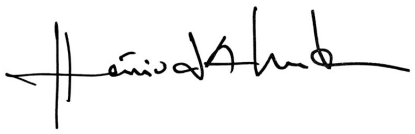
11. Appeal for international dissemination

The FPVL asks the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale (FAI), CIVL, fellow federations, FPVL members, clubs, schools and specialist media organisations to distribute these recommendations to 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 consolidated version currently in force on the ANAC portal.
• Decree-Law No. 238/2004, use of civil free-flight and ultralight aircraft: consult the applicable consolidated text.
• FAI / CIVL, safety documents and guidance: https://www.fai.org/page/sporting-code-section-7
• FPVL, information for pilots, clubs, schools, licences and insurance: https://fpvl.pt

Yours in sport.



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