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Subject: The Catheter Saga - A Synopsis

After watching, reading and digesting all the rec.aviation.soaring threads on this topic, which seemed to have sprung from my recent post entitled "Painless Removal of External Male Catheter? (ouch)", I thought that I would write a synopsis of what I learned.

I am going to be quite frank and honest here. When I first starting using a catheter, helpful information was almost nowhere to be found. Thus I see this as a service to the community. You may copy this into newsletters, etc, to your heart's content.

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To Use or Not? - There seemed to be a 50/50 split between the responders that do/don't use a catheter. I am going to ignore the debate here and assume that you are going to use a catheter. In my honest opinion (IMHO) I believe that catheters should be used as they reduce the amount of fiddle around in flight, which is always the safest way to fly.

What an External Male Catheter looks like - An external male catheter looks like a condom with a hole in the end. It goes on more-or-less like a condom (details later) with a few important differences.

Brand/Model - The brand/model which seemed to be the most recommended is the Mentor brand "Clear Advantage with Aloe". It seems to be the best for staying on and, more importantly, coming off without removing important body parts in the bargain (more later). This, and most catheters, have an adhesive inside to keep it attached to your penis. Some others do not use any adhesive, using instead a strap around the outside. I will only discuss the adhesive type which I prefer. Cost is about \$3 each. See the "Sources" section below.

Sizing - This is a bit of a sensitive subject but an important one. Too small and you will not be very comfortable after a few hours. Too large and you may end up with a wet spot, which is also not very comfortable after a few hours. To help out, there is a handy sizing guide on the Internet (I am not kidding about this). It may be embarrassing but just shut the door to the bathroom (loo, WC) and get the job done. See http://www.mentorcorp.com/pdf/dm_male_measurement_guide.pdf

Application - First and foremost, and no mincing of words, trim back the hairs at the base of your penis. The catheter's adhesive is sticky on purpose - and not getting hairs caught is 90% of the way to a "painless" removal. Review the pictorial guide printed on the Mentor packaging (quite humorous scale wise). This next part I will describe is somewhat tricky and isn't on the packaging. The adhesive of the catheter starts mid way down the inside of the tube of the catheter and stops before the tail end. The adhesive belongs on the shaft of your penis, not the head which is quite sensitive and not at the base where hairs can get caught. As you roll on the catheter, the adhesive begins to appear on the OUTSIDE of the catheter (you will understand this when you roll one on). You need to roll the catheter all the way out until all of the adhesive is against your penis and the non-adhesive tail is visible. Leaving some of the adhesive on the outside is an invitation to getting hairs caught. This means that depending on your length you may need to start with a 1/2" (12mm) or more of a "reservoir" at the head so that the tail is fully deployed against the shaft. Finally, press the catheter's adhesive firmly onto the shaft of your penis. You will not want to do this (worrying about removal) but you need to do it to prevent accidents.

Use in Flight - There are three general ways to gather your urine each with pros and cons. They all begin with the catheter and a piece of surgical hose about 6"-12" (15-30cm) long. The hose then leads to...

....a "container" - The idea is to use a bag or bottle of some sort (not a standard urine leg bag - see below) to capture the urine. Sometimes the bag or bottle is filled with an absorbent material to help prevent spilling. A sanitary napkin or small diaper is perfect. Pros: Simple and inexpensive. Cons: Can spill and smell as there isn't a permanent connection between the tube and the container. You have to fiddle with something before urination. Disposal of the urine after the flight.

....a "hose over the side" - Many gliders have rigged up a pipe to connect the catheter's tubing to the outside world. Placement of the outlet pipe is critical as urine (basically salt water) can get into bad places within your glider. The "best" placement of the exit tube may be on the gear door so that the outlet is away from the glider. The trick is finding a spot with enough negative pressure so that the urine is sucked out of the tubing but not too much so that the urine might not leave the glider. Pros: Nothing to dispose of after the flight or store during the flight. Cons: Corrosion risk. For experimental gliders only unless a certified mechanic will sign off on your modification (unlikely). You may have to fiddle with something before urination (gear doors). You have to flush the system out afterwards.

....a "urine leg bag" - This is a standard medical supply item which was designed precisely for this application. It has a one way valve at the inlet and a on/off valve at the outlet. Pros: No fiddling, just go whenever you need to. Reduced risk of leakage. You can hide the bag in the leg of your pants. Cons: The bags are \$4-\$5 each but one or two will last a season. Disposal of the urine after the flight. Depending on your glider, you may have to urinate a bit up hill into the bag (this has not been a problem for me).

Going - Once you have all the plumbing in place (do this before takeoff) then you just go, hopefully with as little fiddling as possible. As you go, you may feel some back pressure on your penis which will make you worry about leaking. I have never leaked from my first use of a catheter so after your first worried moments, you will relax. Practice on the ground so that you know what to expect. You may find that some urine remains in the catheter and against your penis. My doctor says that this is not an issue for the length of time we are talking about.

Back on Terra Firma - So, you're back on the ground and you have a bag full of urine. Now, what do you do with it? There is the embarrassment factor to deal with - just get over it and act like it is the most natural thing in the world. Trust me, the newbies will begin to ask for your advice. Because I use a urine leg bag, I am not concerned with spillage as I exit the glider. To prevent any bio-hazard risk (is there one?), flush the urine down the toilet. Wash out the urine bag with clean water and allow to dry.

Catheter Removal - Now comes the part we all dread. I have had the best luck with simply reversing the application procedure and rolling off the catheter. Others recommend a warm shower which is not a bad idea after a long flight. Another recommendation is a product called Detachol(R) (www.detachol.com). This is an adhesive removal product which is "...a gentle, non-irritating, adhesive remover used to remove dressings, wound closure strips, tapes, tubes...".

Bottom line - Use a catheter. Practice. It is not as difficult as

you think. And it will help your cross country flying by removing that fear of "I've got to land because I've got to go." Finally, you will be a safer pilot.

Sources - I suggest that you visit a local medical supply house in your community. Don't worry about being embarrassed, they handle this type of thing for a living. In fact, I will bet that you are the first pilot that they have dealt with and, being out of the ordinary, may find interesting. They can set you up with everything that you will need (bag, catheter, tubing, etc). There are also started kits available. All of these products are also available on the Internet at one of the many medical supply locations.

I appreciate any comments. Please let me know how things worked out for you.