

## KEY SKILLS FOR ANY EMERGENCY



**Prepare so your first actions are correct when needed.** You're doing that by reading this manual and customizing strategies to the airplane(s) you fly. Part of that is reviewing procedures per your POH and from experts or type clubs for your airplane. Part of that is updating procedures as equipment is added or removed. And, of course, part of that is practicing emergency procedures—and strategies—on a regular basis.



**Fly the airplane.** In the heat of the moment, this is always the most important thing. If you keep your cool and don't lose control of the airplane, your odds of survival are good, even if you don't do all the procedures correctly. Lose control of the airplane and your prospects are dim, no matter what else you do well.



**Know your systems and troubleshoot.** Effectiveness on this action depends on preparation, but it's a separate skill to perform and think clearly under pressure. That's easier for some people than others, but it's a skill anyone can learn.



**Prioritize, don't multitask.** Maj. Charles Winchester III of M.A.S.H. fame once said, "I do one thing at a time, I do it very well, and then I move on." We kid ourselves thinking we multitask as pilots. The best pilots can prioritize and execute actions in series so fluidly it seems like they are doing several things at once. Finish the most important task as much as practical before taking on the next thing, even when time is tight.



**Work the system and use all resources.** You're never completely alone in the airplane. If air traffic control is on the radio, get their help where you can. Other pilots might hear even a "blind" call and be of assistance. Another pilot on board can certainly help, but so can a passenger holding a flashlight, reading a checklist, or performing any other task that lightens your workload. Even if you're physically alone and "off the grid," the voices of your instructors in your head can help you focus. Really.



**Know when to slow down.** Pilots talk about "winding the watch" to prevent a rash action that will be regretted later. You don't need to think fast in every emergency. There are vanishingly few actions in an airplane that must be performed without time for a few seconds' reflection. When you see oil pressure is zero, a moment for a reality check could prevent an emergency landing when you discover it was only a failed gauge. In many situations, such as poor visibility, low fuel, or high workload, actually flying at a slower airspeed can help you cope. Except when your airspeed gets too close to stall speed; then you might want to speed up.



**Never give up.** There's a famous (but probably apocryphal) story of a Huey helicopter sliding across the tarmac in a shower of sparks after a rough emergency landing. Tower asks if they're OK and the pilot answers, "I don't know. I ain't done crashing yet." Even if the story is questionable, the takeaway is real. You must continue flying the airplane toward the best outcome, even as parts start getting removed by trees, until all motion stops. Perhaps related to this is something aviation writer Dave Hirschman says is the first action every pilot should take when faced with an emergency: Decide that everything will be OK—and then act to make it so.