

Pilot crusades for safer skies

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7/23/2007 - **DAVIS-MONTHAN AIR FORCE BASE, Ariz. (AFPN)** -- One man's personal mission to help improve flight safety is making headway through the aviation community.

Lt. Col. Ned Linch, 12th Air Force chief of flight safety, is an F-16 Fighting Falcon pilot with more than 4,000 hours in the cockpit of the F-16, experimental aircraft and airliners. He is determined to work on reducing near misses and mid-air collisions between military and civilian light aircraft.

"I have been on both sides of the coin," Colonel Linch said. "I've had a near miss with an F-16 while flying as a civilian, and with more than 2,225 hours in the F-16, I've had two engine problems yet multiple near misses with civilians, and lots of disrupted training due to civilians blasting through active special use airspace ... and in most cases, the civilian aviator was legal."



The SeeAndAvoid Web site was created to help eliminate midair collisions and reduce close calls through continuous flight safety and proper flight planning. (Courtesy graphic)

For several years, Colonel Linch has been getting the word out to both military and civilian pilots on how to avoid close encounters and is now helping promote www.SeeAndAvoid.org, an Air National Guard-born and Department of Defense-sponsored Web site whose goal is to eliminate midair collisions and reduce close calls through continuous flight safety and proper flight planning.

Through Colonel Linch's 22-year career, he has written numerous articles and has gone on various road trips to spread the word on mid-air collision avoidance, but after hearing about SeeAndAvoid, he saw the great potential in it and is now a volunteer spokesperson for the organization.

"I sent a message to SeeAndAvoid.org to see if they'd like me to help promote their Web site then I'd volunteer to fly out to the largest air show in the country, (in) Oshkosh, (Wis.), park my experimental airplane next to an F-16 and handout promotional materials," said Colonel Linch.

"(Air Combat Command officials) heard about the project and came back and said it was a great idea," he said, "so they are funding me to do just that. Along the way, several organizations joined in the project, including the Air National Guard Bureau, Defense Safety Oversight Council, Concurrent Technologies Corporation and MacroSystems, to name a few."

The Oshkosh airshow runs July 23 to 29 and is one of the largest air shows in the world. It will host more than 700,000 people and 2,500 participating show aircraft. It is estimated that 10,000 to 15,000 aircraft visit Oshkosh each year during the fly-in.

"This is the perfect place to promote SeeAndAvoid.org to the civilian aviator and increase our relations with the Experimental Aircraft Association and the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association as we work together to prevent future close calls and accidents." said Colonel Linch.

According to SeeAndAvoid's Web site, since 1978 there has been an average of 30 midair collisions in the United States each year. These collisions resulted in an average of 75 deaths per year. There are also more than 450 near-midair collisions reported each year.

"It's the responsibility of all pilots to see and avoid each other as we share the skies safely," said Colonel Linch. "Over time, I expect www.SeeAndAvoid.org to continue improving with new innovative technologies to increase awareness and help decrease the dreaded close encounter."