

THE SIMPLE ANSWER: General aviation, or GA, refers to all topics related to flying for private citizens, outside of commercial air service.



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WHAT IS GENERAL AVIATION?



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AS SIMPLE AS THAT?

Yes. And as complex. General aviation includes all forms of flying, as diverse as overnight package delivery or a weekend visit back home, an emergency medical evacuation, inspection trips to remote construction sites, crop dusting and airborne law enforcement. General aviation benefits the community in so many ways it's hard to cover them all, but we'll cover a few of them here.

ISN'T IT JUST FOR THE RICH?

A common misconception is that personal or small business aircraft are only for the wealthy. In fact, private air travel is more accessible than ever, and has gained in popularity among the middle class.

CAN ANYONE LEARN TO FLY?

Learning to fly general aviation aircraft is possible for just about anyone. There are many pilots flying today with disabilities, including deafness and paralysis.

WHO UTILIZES GENERAL AVIATION?

More than 90% of the roughly 210,000 civil aircraft registered in the United States are general aviation aircraft. And of the nation's approximately 600,000 pilots, an estimated 500,000+ fly general aviation airplanes. The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) has over 350,000 members. An estimated 65% of general aviation flights are conducted for business and public services that need more transportation flexibility than the airlines can offer. A 700-mile business trip to see four clients would take four days and three hotel bills. The same trip could be done in one day flying a small airplane. It would be impossible for a CEO and staff to work at 30,000 feet in a commercial airliner en route to a major meeting, but a regular event in a private jet. That's the flexibility of general aviation at its best.

Like the family automobile, the family airplane can provide mobility for work and pleasure, and it's almost always more enjoyable by air. The family airplane can triple the distance of vacation travel comfortably, bypassing the stress and frustration of traffic.

IS GENERAL AVIATION SAFE?

General aviation has an excellent and steadily improving safety record, since the big surge in private and business flying that followed WWII. The total accident rate has decreased by more than 85%—down to an average of just six accidents per 100,000 flight hours. The latest data show general aviation flies more than 20 million hours each year. Incidentally, many commercial pilots also fly general aviation aircraft for pleasure!

WHO BENEFITS FROM GENERAL AVIATION?

The fleet of general aviation aircraft is the mainspring of a \$20 billion a year industry that generates more than \$219 billion in economic activity. Communities across the country benefit from municipal airports for the business traveler taking advantage of rapid, on-demand air transportation, as well as being the gateway for visiting pilots to local tourism. They stay in hotels, eat at restaurants, visit historic sites.

GENERAL AVIATION SAVES LIVES

Every day, general aviation transports blood supplies, vital transplant organs, and other time-critical, life-saving elements. Air ambulances carry out medevac rescues and provide urgent transportation to trauma and other emergency medical centers. Helicopter emergency medical evacuation is nearly doubling survival rates by getting accident victims to hospitals within the first critical “Golden Hour.” Many pilots volunteer their services (and often the use of their own aircraft) to organizations that transport patients who cannot endure land travel to distant, specialized treatment centers, at no cost to patients in need.

GENERAL AVIATION OFFERS SPEED AND FLEXIBILITY

More and more people are discovering that general aviation is fast, efficient, and safe, opening a whole new vista of travel opportunities. For business and personal travel, general aviation means going where you want to go (not just where the airlines go), when you want to go (free from airline schedules), and in privacy. GA offers more flexibility and productivity than any other mode of travel can provide.

GENERAL AVIATION PROTECTS OUR ENVIRONMENT

The most efficient and cost-effective way to conduct wildlife surveys, map wetland losses and soil erosion, follow bird migrations, patrol parklands, and detect pipeline spills is with general aviation aircraft. Specially equipped government and private aircraft gather information vital to the work of wildlife specialists, park rangers, prospectors, environmentalists, and many others. General aviation has long been our front line in fighting forest fires. Helicopter and fixed-wing water bombers save millions of acres of woodlands each year, protecting homes, national parks, and the nation’s precious forests.

GENERAL AVIATION MAKES YOUR DRIVING SAFER, SMOOTHER

Airborne traffic reporters broadcasting on radio and television help millions of Americans in their daily commute, reporting accidents and other tie-ups to drivers and the police. The maps you use to plan a road trip are drawn and updated from photo data collected in the air. Urban planners, engineers, and government agencies also use the same basic information to plan street and highway construction and other infrastructure improvements.

GENERAL AVIATION WORKS WHILE YOU SLEEP

By cutting down the cost of “float” until checks clear, general aviation plays a vital role in banking and commerce. All night long, general aviation expedites financial transactions by transporting canceled checks and other documents throughout the Federal Reserve System. General aviation also flies important documents and overnight packages to offices, factories, and individuals under next-day time pressures. Express freight and mail to thousands of small towns where major air carriers don’t fly also move faster by general aviation.

GENERAL AVIATION AIDS AGRICULTURE

“Ag pilots” treat more than 75 million acres of cropland each year, boosting production of the nation’s agricultural bounty. Planting, too, can often be done more efficiently by air. 95% of the U.S. rice crops are planted using aircraft. Ranchers also use general aviation aircraft to manage herds and grazing land. Agriculture and general aviation are longtime partners in progress.

GENERAL AVIATION FACILITATES LAW ENFORCEMENT

General aviation aircraft have revolutionized law enforcement in federal, state, and local jurisdictions. Police use light airplanes and helicopters to patrol highways, apprehend suspects, support ground units, monitor national borders, and locate lost children. In a single year, airborne Los Angeles law enforcement officers responded to more than 30,000 incidents, an average of 3.8 per hour. The result: 3,500 arrests, 1,354 suspects spotted, 747 stolen cars recovered and 205 residential and other urban fires discovered. That’s government productivity, made possible by general aviation.

GENERAL AVIATION: THE PEOPLE’S AIR CARRIER

If scheduled airlines are the nation’s air transportation arteries, general aviation is its equally important capillary system. Charter and air taxi flights carry passengers to and from smaller cities, thousands of which have no airline service. Business, cargo, and personal flights reach anywhere, any time—on the traveler’s or shipper’s schedule, not the airline’s. About 75% of major airline flights operate out of just 46 big city airports. 70% of all airline passengers are shuttled among 30 hub airports. In all, only about 560 U.S. airports are certified for scheduled airline service with aircraft seating more than 30 passengers. But general aviation can access all 19,600 public and private landing facilities in the United States.

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