

PROBLEMS OF NEW API MEMBERS

To the newcomer accustomed to dealing with FBO organizations, API may seem amorphous and remote. This is normal. API is an ownership group. Our form of joint ownership works, but it may take some getting used to. Nobody directly runs it, dispatches aircraft, or answers to the rest of us in the usual employee-employer or supplier-customer modes. Considerable reliance is placed on the individual member to act responsibly and take care of his own difficulties. You will find, however, that the members are all vitally interested in the aircraft, and in your operation of them. If you have a problem, call the appropriate API officer, or indeed, any member you think might be able to help. If at all possible, members will do everything in their power to help. (You, of course, will do the same for them).

1. Scheduling and Availability

Operations oversees scheduling, but normally does not interfere with it. Through the trip-notification mechanism, an attempt is made to steer maintenance scheduling, or to head off situations where all 3 aircraft are gone on long trips. Persuasion is sometimes used to keep the 172 available for training, but, in general, within the limits set in the Operating Rules, you may expect to use the airplane as if it were your own.

New members sometimes have trouble with availability. If you have joined just as the weather turns nice in May, or just after API has acquired a new airplane, you may feel that everything is booked to the end of time. This isn't really so. The schedule is extremely volatile, with change taking place right up to the last minute. If you specifically need an aircraft and find it booked, ~~ask the answering service to notify you of any openings.~~ Don't be bashful about calling the people with reservations. If they can shift their plans for you, they will; if they can't they won't, but you won't know unless you ask. They'll notify you if they're going to cancel, but again, only if you ask. Some members lead complicated lives; others are completely flexible. Finding out, and making appropriate arrangements, is up to the individual member.

Admittedly, Maintenance sometimes cuts into availability in an awkward way. When this has happened, you may want to call the cognizant maintenance volunteer and try to work something out. Don't expect him to upset firm arrangements already made, however, or cut into the contingency time allowed. Maintenance is maintenance: it has to be done correctly, on time, in an orderly fashion, without rushing the mechanics.

If for some reason, you can't reserve a plane, or your reservation gets shot down, that's too bad, but it's just the way it is. Go commercial, or rent an FBO's plane, and better luck next time. Generally, availability problems don't last. For most of the year, the aircraft sit in their tiedowns, bleaching in the sun, and you can simply take your pick.

At this writing (1979) a reassessment of fleet costs vs. availability is under way. For well-known reasons, in recent years the membership has undertaken more business flying than ever before, an activity which has led to heavy use of the performance aircraft, and consumed a certain amount of their short-lead-time availability. At the same time, training and vacation flying have fallen off, typically leaving the schedule book wide open a week or so ahead. The paradoxical result has been simultaneous very good and not so good availability depending upon how you look at it.

Further changes in use patterns are taking place, however, and once again subject is under debate. Availability can be improved if we're willing to pay for it, but the tradeoffs get to be costly. Your own opinion as a recently-joined member will be most welcome.

2. Maintenance

Competent maintenance of superior equipment is what API is supposed to be all about, and indeed, the excellent condition of the airplanes reflects the concern of people who are in the habit of depending upon them. One object of the trip notification rule is to make sure that Maintenance is aware of your needs in time to take care of any items needing attention. Sometimes, though, we encounter unrealistic expectations on the part of new members, who forget that we have no weary chief mechanic out on the line to mend the pipes and sweep up after the elephants.

If a problem is encountered, by all means call API Maintenance and report it. If it's something they're already aware of, the Maintenance Officer or his assistants will be happy to go over the situation with you. If they're not aware of it, they will thank you for it (and call those who they suspect did not report it. Failure to report needed maintenance is a serious breach of the operating rules). Where a minor squawk has been allowed to persist, it usually turns out that the job is being held until it can be efficiently scheduled in with other work. Often, there is something you can do to help.

On the other hand, work may have been put off simply because the Maintenance volunteers may be every bit as busy as you are. (We're all busy at something else, or we couldn't afford to fly). More frequently, the shop is waiting for a special part, or it may be loaded heavily with other work. These things happen, like the weather, and are a part of flying, although we've become pretty good at expediting when we have to.

If it's an emergency, and you have been unable to reach anyone in Maintenance, it's not altogether out of line to ask the shops themselves directly for help. Bear in mind though that attempts to elbow your way to the top of the priority heap, to undercut scheduled arrangements, or to order the mechanics around will be viewed very dimly. Whatever you do, report what's being done to Maintenance, so that the effort stays organized. Nothing is worse, or leaves a poorer impression with those upon whom we depend, than perennial confusion about what to do and who to take the orders from. And for goodness sake, when someone goes out of his way to get an aircraft ready on time for you, show some appreciation! It's poor form to grumble, and very poor form indeed not to notify Maintenance in advance if you're cancelling!

3. Operating Restrictions

New members occasionally find one or another of our operating restrictions oppressive, particularly those having to do with minimum pilot qualifications to fly the performance aircraft. A first, rather blunt answer is that the rules are the rules, and those that aren't simply required by our insurance company have been found necessary, one way or another, for other reasons that we'll be happy to explain.

On the other hand, if upon consideration, it seems to you that an exception should be made, by all means speak up. Explain your problem to the appropriate API officer; perhaps something can be done. Ordinarily, however, rule exceptions won't be granted during the very beginning of our acquaintanceship. We accept only people we think will make good members, but there's no way to establish ahead of time how well things will in fact work out. Making special arrangements, modifying By-Laws, or adjusting the insurance coverage to accommodate a new person's wishes, only to have him or her depart shortly, is something we obviously want to avoid. Then, too, some initial exceptions may just not be wise from an operations standpoint. We would like to see you come and go a few times, pay your bills, and demonstrate qualities hoped for in new members before we approve of any significant rule exceptions.

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When it comes to observing our rules, we feel that the demands ^{of} flight safety are not different in kind from those of our rules. The member who can take in stride the need to telephone the next person about a delay or malfunction is the same member who will take the trouble to check weather carefully, perform a conscientious pre-flight, and all the rest of it. Our operating experience tends to bear this out: in 20 years, we have had no serious injuries or fatalities; on the other hand, among those who have left upon finding our rules irksome, there have been two known fatal accidents and some other bad history.

Then, too, crowding our rules, or playing games with them as one might the rules of the IRS, is utterly inappropriate in an organization built on mutual trust. Interpretations that flout our principles or defy common sense will soon produce an invitation to leave. If the intent of rule is not clear to you, or if a question of interpretation does arise, get a clarification from the Operations Manager.

4. General Advice on Taking Care Of Difficulties

When you encounter difficulties, or have suggestions to make, by all means speak up! Our formal meetings are infrequent; don't wait until then. Talk to other members; call the appropriate API Officer. Chances are that others have the same problem too. We need your help in running API. If one channel is unresponsive, try another. Many members lead active lives that allow only sporadic attention to API matters. Sometimes it takes repeated tries to get the mule's attention.

On the other hand, API has been in successful operation for two decades in a

field not noted for the success of loosely-run, volunteer organizations, and there are a few things we've learned not to do. If your request amounts to one of these, we'll do our best to explain our position, but the answer may still be "no." Try to take advantage of our experience.

If you think, nonetheless, that we're wrong, by all means speak up and try to convince us. Remember, however, that you are not among strangers, and that you yourself will not be a stranger for long. Pressure, finageling, or attempting to throw your weight around is inappropriate. Joint ownership is like strong photographic developer: it quickly produces a picture of what each member is like, warts and all. Mutual respect among members is the only condition under which a volunteer group can hope to operate. Don't let your initial picture become an embarrassment. In certain ways, we do have to live together.