

With all the emphasis on runway incursion prevention, what has become clear, in Alaska at least, is that pilots are not the main problem. Many incidents have been the result of pedestrian, bicycle or vehicle traffic straying onto taxiways and runways. Is the solution to restrict airport access so that the general public can't get to the aircraft movement areas? Will aviation users have to accept restrictions on their access, as well?

Many of today's pilots grew up looking over or through the airport fence, dreaming of flying. Even those who never followed their dream have a fondness for aviation from those kinds of experiences. How will tomorrow's pilots spark their interest if we close even general aviation airports to public access? Will the next generation accept aviation as of benefit to them, or reject it as someone else's hobby?

Alaska's airports have, for the most part, escaped the anti-airport sentiment so common in the lower 48. In fact, many Alaskans are pleased to have an airport in their community. Will public acceptance continue if "their" airport is closed to them?

You can help reduce the need for extra security measures by setting a good example of proper airport use. Start by respecting signs and pavement markings. It may be safe for an aircraft owner, pilot or mechanic to drive on a taxiway that is marked "Aircraft Only – No Vehicles" or to cross an active runway as a shortcut to the other side of the field. Unfortunately, it also tells the general public, who may lack the knowledge and experience to do it safely, that they are free to disregard those same signs.

Similarly, it may be safe for aviators to use an airport, which might also be workplace and "home away from home," for leisure activities like walking, jogging, bicycling, and playing with your children or your dog. But is an airport safe if the general public uses it in the same way? Local kids (and adults) who see aviation users do these things will do them, too, and then some.

Finally, don't ignore improper uses of the airport. The driver, bicyclist or pedestrian you ignore could be the next runway incursion, possibly with fatal consequences. If you don't feel comfortable dealing with a violator yourself, call the airport manager, the tower or the police.

Be a good example. If you aren't, we face the need for security measures which are not only inconvenient to us, but may alienate the future pilots, customers and airport neighbors the aviation industry depends on for its economic and political survival.