

Propellers

There are few nevers in aviation, but an engine should never be started when there is an unattended small child in the area. In general, it's really a good idea to avoid starting whenever there are people nearby. Always shout "clear," "prop," or your favorite term immediately prior to actual engine start, regardless of where the checklist puts it. Then look around the aircraft before engaging the starter; to the uninitiated, the word "clear" makes them look up to the sky and smile knowingly.

Even with all these precautions, some people can be mesmerized by a rotating propeller. Some years ago a pilot's wife walked back to the airplane for one last goodbye. She walked right through the running prop and lost an arm. To help reduce the potential for blindly walking into a prop, it is a good idea to paint the tip with alternate-colored stripes such as red tip, yellow stripe, and then red stripe. The face of the blade, which faces the pilot, should be painted flat black to prevent the pilot from being subjected to strobe effect. This problem occurs when flying with the sun at your back or at night with the aircraft lights on.

If you have reason to believe there is an impending blade failure while in flight, reduce the power to idle. The slower RPM will help you observe the prop to assess the situation. If there is an actual separation, immediately shut down the engine, as the resultant vibration could easily tear the engine from its mounts. While the propeller is a highly reliable piece of equipment, failures do occur.