

- For years, performers and event organizers have recognized the critical nature of the 30 minute period immediately prior to a pilot's air show performance. Beginning this summer, ICAS is embarking on an informal program to remind performers and event organizers of the importance of this "sacred 30 minutes." The flying done by air show performers is inherently dangerous. The margins are tight and attention to detail is critical. One of those details is ensuring that the pilot is mentally prepared to perform this demanding brand of aerobatic flying. During the 30 minutes before they fly, performers will take a few minutes to watch an earlier performer to see the smoke drift at altitude and consider how it will affect his or her maneuvers. The performer will mentally – and, in some cases, literally -- walk through the entire routine. Hands "fly" through the maneuvers as he or she dances back and forth on the ramp, twisting and turning. Once finished with the mental preparation, there still remains the walk-around, strapping in, running through aircraft checklists and starting. During this time, the last thing the performer needs is a distraction. And distractions can come from almost anywhere at an air show. They can come from a last minute fuel truck, a failed smoke oil pump or spectators wandering through the hot box. Distractions can also come from sources outside the event. Just because a performer leaves home doesn't mean that the concerns of everyday life get left behind. A sick child, financial troubles or a cell phone argument with a spouse can all create a distraction. Pilots learn early in their flight training to compartmentalize. They leave issues related to the rest of their lives on the ground when they prepare to fly. To successfully compartmentalize, performers need to focus and they need the time before they fly to get in "the zone" and put those distractions behind them. Event organizers and performers need to work together to preserve the sanctity of those 30 minutes. Everybody who might be in a position of being or causing a distraction should be made aware of the importance of mental preparation during that last half hour. Performers should take steps themselves to separate themselves from the activities of the show during the half-hour just before their performance.