

CALLBACK

From NASA's Aviation Safety Reporting System



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CAUTION: HAZARDOUS RAMP OPERATIONS

Ramp Operations (Ops) comprises a complex network of activity and includes most services that aircraft receive in between flights and overnight. Those services are many and varied. Fueling, loading, unloading, and moving aircraft are but a few, but every service presents specific and peculiar hazards for Ramp Agents and flight crews to navigate.

The airport ramp is frequently viewed as a precarious work area with many hazards. Several factors are at play. Ramps can be crowded with aircraft and other large vehicles. Often, hazardous substances and servicing products are present. Diverse aircraft servicing requirements demand that workers with local goals and interests operate simultaneously and efficiently. Time is almost always compressed, and hazards can be overt or subdued and easily missed. Diligence, strict adherence to procedures, situational awareness, and personal and professional discipline are fundamental in mitigating ramp hazards and ensuring ramp safety.

This month, *CALLBACK* shares incident reports that reveal the multitude, magnitude, and range of Ramp Ops hazards and their inherent danger. Challenge yourself in determining how you might have recognized and mitigated these threats.

Part 121 – The Pit and the Pendulum

This Ramp Agent encountered an unusual, unanticipated, and frightening hazard while performing customary ramp duties. Fortunately, the incident concluded well.

■ *I was in the forward pit looking for a couple of bags.... I knew [Maintenance was] done with the pressurization test because...Operations said they had run the test and...needed 30 additional minutes to figure out [the] problem. There were no Ramp Agents plane-side because they were waiting inside until they were told to get gate checks and close up [the] flight.... I had found one of the bags I was looking for. I was looking for the other bag, and the door closed. I yelled that I was in the pit, but no one could hear me. I called out on the radio to the Lead...to tell him I was in the pit. He did not answer. I called the Ramp Agent and asked him to open the door.... I could hear a faint noise and all of a sudden my ears started to hurt like they needed to pop. I then realized that the Mechanics were re-pressurizing the plane again. I called out on the radio. I started to panic, and my ears were*

really starting to hurt worse. I could hear someone trying to open the cargo door, but it wouldn't open. I knew there was a way to open the door from the inside, so I tried and I couldn't open it. I was really upset and panicking at this point. I wasn't sure if I was going to be ok because the plane was still pressurizing. There was a lot of chatter on [the] radio. I do remember the Operations Agent telling the Ramp Agent that Maintenance was going to depressurize the plane and not to open the door till they gave the word because it could be dangerous. Once...Maintenance told...Operations that it was clear, the Ramp Agent opened the door. It was so scary. I have never been that scared in my life. It was the unknown of what was happening or could happen.

Part 121 – A Real Twilight Zone

This Ramp Agent discovered a Fueler approaching imminent danger and unaware of the serious threat. Action was taken that may have saved this Fueler's life.

■ *The astart process had just finished, and the GPU and astart hoses were being disconnected. [The] Fueler then began to walk underneath the aircraft and walk about 6-7 feet in front of the running #2 Engine. I noticed he was walking towards the plane and underneath, and I tried screaming and waving at him. Luckily, he saw me and ran towards me to avoid being ingested into the engine. I pulled him aside and had a stern talk [with him] about what just happened. He stated that he saw the astart operator walk towards the aircraft and assumed the plane was off. He did not know about the astart and that the engines were running. [The] Fueler was coming from [another] gate...and crossed through where the engine was running.*

Part 121 – Hit and Run, or Touch and Go?

Two Ramp Agents described an incident that clearly had an unacceptable result. Fortunately, damage was minimal, and no suggestion of personal injury was made.

From the Vehicle Driver's report:

■ *I sat down on the pushback [and] connected my headset to the flight deck. [The] flight deck was doing their checklist on the hot mic, so [we]...were able to hear that checklist. My First Officer side wing walker went to pull his main chocks.*

As he was underneath the aircraft pulling the chocks, [the] flight deck completed their checklist and without asking me... he released the brakes and the aircraft rolled...and struck my wing walker in the back. I notified the pilot that he released the brakes without asking and hit the wing walker. The pilot then said he didn't have to ask before doing so, and he didn't know the gate was on a slope.

From the second Ramp Agent's report:

■ *[The] flight deck released brakes on [the] aircraft before being told to do so. I was removing chocks on the First Officer's side, and the airplane rolled forward, snagging my vest and tearing it.*

Part 121 – High Wind Warning

These two Ramp Agents reported a harrowing experience during pushback. The hazard had deadly potential, but good fortune prevailed, and no casualties were sustained.

From the first Ramp Agent's report:

■ *Wing walking my flight on [gate] XX, I was... disconnecting the tow bar, [and] there was a widebody aircraft that pushed off [gate] XY. The aircraft began to taxi; the jet blast started pushing me towards the running engine (#2). I began to fear for my life. I felt like I was going to be blown into that engine. I felt like I was being lifted off the ground and blown away. I was able...to run away trying to save myself. I waited...for the other airplane to taxi away and went back to disconnect the headset and close the panel door.... [That] aircraft began [the] taxi process blowing me towards [the] running engine of my aircraft.*

From the second Ramp Agent's report:

■ *The Ramp Agent fought to stay on his feet and avoided death.... I was able to lie down on the ground to avoid being blown into the engine.... While our flight was being pushed... the plane on [gate] XY also was pushing. As my Ramp Agent was doing final departure release, the XY [plane]...nearly [blew] the agent into the engine.*

Part 121 – The Longest Moment

Two Ramp Agents reported a serious condition at the moment aircraft control was intended to be exchanged but instead, was lost. No damage or injuries occurred.

From the first Ramp Agent's report:

■ *Pushing back out of [gate XX]...the disconnect process went normally. Once the Lead pulled away from the aircraft...the airplane started to roll.... The plane...stopped when the Main Nose Tire made contact with the tug.*

From the second Ramp Agent's report:

■ *Aircraft X pushed out onto spot XX. Once I confirmed the brakes were set from the pilot, I relayed it to my agent with the hand signal. My agent then removed the strap from the tug, and I pulled away from the aircraft. After [that], the plane began moving on its own power and made contact with the tug. No damage, no injuries.*

Part 121 – Invisible, or Plane in Sight?

This Ramp Agent reported witnessing a critical ground conflict between two aircraft that developed unchecked, and fortunately, with no contact or other consequences.

■ *I was instructed by the flight deck to disconnect the GPU and air from the aircraft [737-900 on gate XX]. Then I heard an airplane coming in diagonally to gate XY, thinking it's an A330 as usual. Instead, it was a 777-300. Normally they park that aircraft over on the XX concourse, but for some reason, the Airport Operations Department placed them next to us. Normally when we have an aircraft occupying gate XX, 777s are usually towed in.... I watched the left winglet come close to our tail and go over our right vertical stabilizer, and the Contract wing walker seemed rather careless about it as well. I was expecting a collision...and my anxiety went up because of it. Thankfully, it didn't happen. I quickly called my Supervisor and then started taking pictures of the plane to see if they did come at a weird angle. Then the flight deck called me up to the flight deck and wanted to talk to me regarding the incident because they saw my reaction out of the window, and I told them what was going on. Then, my Supervisor arrived on the flight deck as well to elaborate further on the situation.*

Part 91 – Tempting Fate

This FBO Ramp Agent observed an incident and dangerous practice that could have put other aircraft, property, and human life at risk. Luckily, no damage or injuries occurred.

■ *[An] aircraft taxied and parked next to [a] Maintenance hangar. [The] pilot opened the door with the engine still running [and] proceeded to exit the aircraft to retrieve an item from the baggage compartment.... The plane started to move without anyone on board. The pilot quickly got back in, stopped the aircraft, and shut down. The pilot retrieved the item in question, got...in the aircraft, and left the ramp.*

The reports featured in CALLBACK are offered in the spirit of stimulating thought and discussion. While NASA ASRS does not verify or validate reports, we encourage you, our readers, to explore them and draw your own conclusions.

ASRS Alerts Issued in May 2025	
Subject of Alert	No. of Alerts
Aircraft or Aircraft Equipment	3
Airport Facility or Procedure	11
ATC Equipment or Procedure	12
Other	2
TOTAL	28

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A Monthly Safety
Newsletter from
The NASA
Aviation Safety
Reporting System
P.O. Box 189
Moffett Field, CA
94035-0189
<https://asrs.arc.nasa.gov>

May 2025 Report Intake	
Air Carrier/Air Taxi Pilots	5,460
General Aviation Pilots	1,705
Flight Attendants	1,627
Military/Other	679
Controllers	341
Mechanics	240
Dispatchers	206
TOTAL	10,258