



# DECISION-MAKING & WEATHER

## Winter Flying - Risk Awareness - Airmanship

Last Saturday (03 January), I had planned a local VFR flight from Lelystad. Based on local and regional TAFs, aircraft limitations, and my personal minimums I decided to cancel.

I then compared the forecasts with the actual METARs during the planned time window and identified some relevant learning points I'd like to share with you:

### TAF OVERVIEW

The TAFs and aviation weather bulletins (source: KNMI) consistently indicated maritime arctic air, convective snow showers with embedded CBs, rapidly changing conditions, and temporary but significant drops in ceiling and visibility. "Good gaps" were possible, but unreliable in both timing and duration. The forecast did not say "bad all day", it described an **unstable** and **unpredictable** situation.

```
ZCZC
FT021700 EHLE  LELYSTAD/LELYSTAD  NLD  -3
m.
TAF EHLE 021719Z 0218/0324 28010KT 9999
SCT025
TEMPO 0221/0324 29017KT 4000 SHSNRAGS
SCT020CB BKN025
PROB30 TEMPO 0221/0310 1500 SHSN
TSSNRAGS BKN008 SCT015CB
BECMG 0309/0312 31010KT=
```

```
VOORUITZICHTEN VOOR MORGEN:
GEISOLEERDE, MET NAME IN DE ZUIDELIJKE
HELFT OOK GECLUSTERDE MATIGE TOT ZWARE
(NATTE)SNEEUWBUIEN, IN DE
KUSTGEBIEDEN MOGELIJK OOK REGENBUIEN.
HIERBIJ KAN TEVENS ONWEER EN
KORRELHAGEL VOORKOMEN. LANGS DE
ZUIDWESTKUST, VANAF DE MIDDAG LANGS
DE HELE KUST, MATIGE TURBULENTIE. IN DE
MIDDAG AAN DE NOORDKUST
MOGELIJK LOKAAL ZWARE TURBULENTIE.
```

### METAR REALITY AT EHLE

During my intended flying block (12:00-15:00 UTC), visibility was often excellent and winds were light. However, the cloud base temporarily dropped to 300-400 ft (BKN003/OVC004), snow/rain showers with CBs were nearby, and conditions fell below basic VFR minimums before improving again later. This matched the character of the forecast perfectly.

```
METAR EHLE 031155Z
27008KT 9999 FEW002
01/00 Q1000
TEMPO 7000 -SHSNRA FEW022CB
```



```
METAR EHLE 031225Z
27007KT 9999
BKN003 OVC004
01/00 Q1000
BECMG SCT015
```

### WHY THIS MATTERS?

This is a classic **VFR-into-IMC trap** scenario. Conditions may look fine at departure and a local flight may feel "safe", then a shower line moves through, the cloud base collapses, visibility and horizon degrade, and margins disappear. A return to home base may be below the minimums, and nearby airfields may not be better.

**This is not about skill or confidence, it is about predictability and margins!**



## RISK AWARENESS

“But it was flyable later” does **not** mean it was safe earlier. The problem is not how good conditions eventually become, but **how bad they can suddenly get**.

Winter convective weather behaves differently: snow showers and CBs can rapidly lower cloud bases, reduce contrast and horizon, increase turbulence, and significantly increase icing risk.

Local flights are **not immune**. Many accidents start with “just a short local flight”. Distance does not reduce weather risk.

Personal minimums (when respected) remove ego from decision-making, prevent “I think I can manage”, and protect us **before** we are airborne.



## AIRMANSHIP

Good airmanship does **not** mean flying when others would not. It is **not** about “proving skill” by trying to beat the weather.

Good airmanship is saying **NO** early, trusting forecasts rather than hope, avoiding situations that demand “risky manoeuvres”, and being on the ground before safety margins disappear.

## CONCLUSIONS

On this day, the forecast was right. The risk was real. My NO-GO decision prevented a situation where luck would have been required.

This was not too cautious a decision. I did not miss “a good flying day”. In fact, I avoided a day with hidden hazards.

**This is excellent aeronautical decision-making!**

As pilots, we are judged not by the flights we complete, but by the risks we manage. Weather-related accidents rarely start with bad intentions; they start with optimism, pressure, and shrinking safety margins.

Let’s continue to support a club safety culture where **good decisions are valued, personal minimums are respected, and saying NO is considered professional airmanship**.

Fly smart. Fly safe. Happy New Flights!

*Karina van Twisk*

### Links

#### AOPA:

→ [Personal Minimums](#), [Gauging Options](#), [Go or No Go](#), and [Rules to Live By](#).

#### UK CAA:

→ [VFR Flight into IMC Safety Sense SS33](#)