



# Flying into bad weather



Flying into bad weather without the right training and experience can rapidly lead to spatial disorientation. Learning to identify and avoid the red flags that contribute to error chains may help you avoid becoming a statistic.

**A total of 101 occurrences of visual flight rules (VFR) pilots inadvertently flying into instrument meteorological conditions (IMC) in Australian airspace were reported to the Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) in the decade from 1 July 2009 to 30 June 2019. Of those occurrences, nine were accidents resulting in 21 deaths.**

## MAKING SAFE DECISIONS UNDER PRESSURE

So, what should you do if you find yourself approaching a diminishing horizon due to cloud, fog, dust, white-out or blue-out conditions?

- » Maintain control – fly the aircraft first.
- » Make decisions early. When in doubt, turn about, divert or hold in an area of good weather.
- » Make a 180-degree rate 1 turn – establish on instruments early.
- » Slow the aircraft down to reduce your turning radius and give yourself more time to think (make sure you know your aircraft limits and consider your increased stall speed in a turn).
- » If the situation allows, tell your passengers what is happening but don't let this distract you from flying the aircraft and making unpressured decisions.
- » If you need assistance, ask ATC. They are there to help you.

## RED FLAGS

Most inadvertent VFR flights into IMC have common factors.



Rushed and incomplete pre-flight planning



Misinterpretation/underestimation of threats associated with weather forecasts



Overconfidence in adverse conditions



Overestimating cloud heights and visibility (remember your personal pre-flight minimums)



Using phrases like *scud running, she'll be right, I've done this in worse conditions and we're close to our destination*



Passengers pressuring you to go



Pressuring yourself to go

**Weather and forecasting is one of the main topics on CASA's pilot safety hub – [casa.gov.au/pilots](https://casa.gov.au/pilots). Click on the weather and forecasting tile.**

Three key messages are:

- » The importance of thorough pre-flight planning and having alternate plans.
- » Pressing on when there is a possibility of entering IMC carries significant risk of spatial disorientation.
- » The value of using a personal minimums checklist to help manage flight risks.

A personal minimums checklist is an individual pilot's own set of rules and criteria for deciding whether to fly or continue flying. This will depend on the conditions and your knowledge, skills and experience.

A personal 'go/no go' checklist can help take the stress out of difficult conditions both before and during flight.

[illegible]