

■ ■ Remember that imaginary 50-foot obstacle you so diligently practiced avoiding, so you would meet the requirements of your pilot flight test?

Unfortunately, when some pilots are confronted with the real thing, they're not quite so adept. They either forget or ignore what they learned. Or, more likely, they just don't see the obstacle, especially if the hazard is a powerline.

Powerlines continue to take their annual toll of airplanes and lives. In 1971, 147 aircraft got wrapped up in wires and poles, and 31 of those accidents were fatal. Twenty-seven fatal wire/pole mishaps were recorded in 1970, and 24 in 1969. Those are the latest tabulations from the National Transportation Safety Board.

No one really knows how many airports have these almost invisible ob-

structions stretched through the air somewhere in the pattern or along an approach or departure path. But the number is apparently considerable—and still growing. During the past year, AOPA's technical planning division opposed new powerline construction at about 100 sites near airports. (Construction of any object defined as a "hazard" by the FAA cannot be started without notification to the agency. An estimated 75% of the man-made "hazardous" projects are stopped or altered in some way by the FAA after comments are received from affected groups.)

NTSB figures show that there is not likely to be any such thing as a minor incident involving wires and poles. Of the 145 accidents in this category during 1970, the most recent year for which full statistics are available, 51 of

pleasure purposes.

For years, AOPA has continually advocated efforts to bury or move existing powerline hazards near airports. One such localized campaign was begun in the late 1960s by John Rarick (AOPA 240525), of Fort Wayne, Ind. He had gotten entwined in wires during a take-off from a Wisconsin airport in 1967—an accident that killed a close friend.

Although Rarick says he has succeeded in burying wires near several Indiana airports, he is generally discouraged by the apparent lack of interest in his attempts. He has run into publicity problems, he says, and has found it difficult to mount any kind of campaign publicizing the powerline hazard to pilots.

Rarick's approach has been one of gentle persuasion and cooperation,

# POWERLINES: A CONTINUING HAZARD

the aircraft involved were destroyed, and the other 94 were substantially damaged. Despite the apparent severity of these accidents, however, the board's statistics show that 93 of the mishaps caused minor or no injury to the aircraft occupants.

Most frequently it was a small, fixed-wing aircraft that was involved in this type of accident. This category of flying machine accounted for 118 of the tangles with powerlines. Rotorcraft tallied most of the remaining wire/pole collisions—25 hit the obstacles while in flight during 1970.

Of the fixed-wing mishaps, a small majority (64) occurred during the in-flight phase of operation, while there were 36 wire/pole collisions during landings and another 11 during takeoffs.

In terms of the type of flying being done, agricultural work accounted for 36 of the incidents, but the greatest number (58) occurred while pilots were engaged in noncommercial flying for

rather than a hard-hitting attack on the power companies responsible for the lines. According to Rarick, cooperation among pilots, local government and the power company will often result in a satisfactory solution for all groups. If pilots are willing to share the expense of burying lines, that fact sometimes encourages additional cooperation from power companies.

Rarick said one method he uses is to set up a donation pot at airports with powerline problems. A sign at the pot explains the hazard and the campaign to bury the lines, and solicits contributions from pilots using the field.

But no matter how many campaigns there are, and no matter how hard pilots try to eliminate powerlines, there are always going to be wires to contend with. Expect the worst when crossing over wires, and watch your technique—especially at short strips, high-altitude strips, and on high-density-altitude days. □