



# FLIGHT CHECK

## Seeking suitable sites for model-aviation clubs

BY TONY STILLMAN

**W**ith a membership of roughly 164,000, it's no wonder the Academy of Model Aeronautics (AMA) is always on the lookout for flying sites to host model-aviation clubs. And what's a better place for this hobby than an open field in a nearby park or a gymnasium in a recreation center?

### Join The Club

Headquartered in Muncie, Ind., the AMA has represented modelers nationwide since 1936, providing benefits that allow them to fly and safely enjoy the hobby. Benefits include insurance, government advocacy, competition sanctioning, Model Aviation magazine, a safety code, and information for establishing and joining a model-aviation club.

In the mid-1960s, the AMA began to charter clubs, providing members the opportunity to enjoy



camaraderie, exchange modeling tips and tricks, and secure use of flying sites. Today the AMA charters nearly 2,400 clubs throughout the United States.

The AMA offers a variety of programs and other benefits to chartered clubs, such as flying-site assistance and disaster-relief grants, media-recognition rewards, and liability coverage for officers and flying-site owners.

Clubs seek both indoor and outdoor facilities to host events. Many clubs have access to a gymnasium





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## Flight Check

at a local school or in a nearby park or recreation center. For flying larger models, outdoor facilities are utilized.

### Searching For Sites

Although many clubs have specific agreements to use a flying site, many others are actively searching for a suitable place to fly. The AMA encourages clubs to work within their communities and local parks and recreation offices to secure a site. The organization also urges clubs to invite the public to events to watch them fly and learn more about the hobby.

Clubs looking for sites are generally involved in one of the following types of radio-controlled (RC) model aircraft:

- Indoor electric-powered RC
- Outdoor electric-powered

RC park flyers (models that are less than 2 pounds and fly at a maximum speed of 60 mph)

■ Outdoor electric- and fuel-powered models (a maximum weight of 55 pounds and a maximum speed of 200 mph).

### Site Requirements

One of the most popular park and recreation sites that works well for outdoor electric RC park fliers is a soccer field or similar open field. Usually this type of venue is available when not being used for a specific event or game.

Working out a timetable for the club to use the facility is all that is needed. Special equipment is not necessary except for markings or signage to show that the area is for model aircraft operations.

Some park and recreation departments have access to several areas, and may even have a large venue (40 acres or more) to create a traditional model-aircraft flying site. Traditional sites like these will need a smooth runway area—grass or pavement—and designated flight, pit, and spectator areas.

### Costs

Indoor and park flyer sites generally have no associated costs because there are no special requirements—only open space where pilots don't have to worry

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about people wandering into the flying area, for safety reasons.

However, a traditional model-aircraft site will require some investment by park and recreation departments and/or by the club to improve the runway site to ensure a smooth, flat area roughly 50 feet wide and 400 feet long. The surrounding area needs to be free of trees and structures in front of the pilot for approximately 1,500 feet to the left and right of the pilot station and 500 feet in front.

Pilots require marked areas from

with clubs to provide some site-improvement work, and some "go all out" with paved runways and covered pit areas with power, water, and restroom facilities.

### Get Involved

Although some costs and planning time are associated with developing a flying site, there are many benefits to designating a site at a local park or allowing pilots to fly in an indoor facility. For instance, since model pilots are devoted to improving their

which to fly, a pit area for pilots and helpers to prepare the models for flight, and a spectator area behind the pit. If given approval, most clubs work on improving the site on their own. Park and recreation departments often partner

craft, they often spend several hours a week flying and working with others in their clubs, which opens facilities to a demographic that may be untapped in the area. Additionally, the AMA's Liability Insurance Program for Site Owners allows clubs to purchase insurance to cover any damage to the facilities by model aircraft operations when the AMA members are flying; this makes the hobby virtually hassle-free for park departments.

Anyone interested in learning more about developing a flying site should contact the AMA at (765) 287-1256, or visit [www.modelaircraft.org](http://www.modelaircraft.org). **PRB**

**Tony Stillman** is the AMA Flying Site Assistance Coordinator in Muncie, Ind. Contact him at (912) 242-2407, or [fsac@modelaircraft.org](mailto:fsac@modelaircraft.org).

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