

Australian Ballooning Federation

# PILOTS CIRCULAR

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*Pilots Circular is produced by the Australian Ballooning Federation Inc., and contains operational and safety information for all Australian balloonists. All ABF members – from the newest student to the most experienced pilot – are invited to contribute to PC on issues you feel other pilots may wish to know about, or to raise questions that you would like information about. Thanks to all members who contributed to this issue.*

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## Radio Operators Certificates

The Radio Operators Certificate (ROC) is mandatory for all PPC holders. Pilots who do not hold an ROC are not legally permitted to exercise the privileges of their PPC. Any PPC holder doing so will risk suspension of their pilot certificates. A PPC holder with a CASA Flight Radio Operators Certificate (FROL) may operate legally. Students and instructors are reminded that the ROC (or FROL) must be held before first solo flight.

Conduct of student solo flights without ROC will result in those flights not scoring hours for PPC qualification.

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## Power line Incidents

There has been a significant increase in the number of balloon incidents involving powerlines.

Following is a summary of a number of those incidents that have occurred over the last six years. These have been extracted from ATSB reports and any identifying information removed. Our thanks to Steve Griffin for preparing and providing this summary.

### **“Wire Strikes (9 cases)**

1/ The pilot reported that on final approach for landing he sighted 2 power lines ahead on the balloon's track. Once a power line strike was obvious, he landed immediately in accordance with the operations manual procedure. The final descent was completed so that contact with the power line would be with the fabric. After landing, the basket was stationary, but the envelope was blown over the power lines. One of the power lines broke and one fabric panel was destroyed. There were no injuries.

2/ While on approach to land, the balloon contacted a single wire power line prior to contacting the ground. The pilot manoeuvred away from the power line and departed the site to land at a more suitable location.

3/ While flying level up a gully the pilot spotted power lines approximately 5 meters in front. The pilot attempted to out climb the power lines however the base of the basket struck the power lines. The pilot made a precautionary landing in a paddock to inspect for damage. No damage was found.

4/ During an approach to land in a cleared area, the balloon basket contacted a power line. The line stretched and broke and the balloon subsequently landed uneventfully. The balloon was not damaged and all occupants evacuated without injury. The pilot in command reported that he had seen a number of power lines in the area but had not seen the lines that the balloon contacted. This was partially due to the lines being difficult to see because of background foliage. The operator reported that training for their pilots in regard to searching for power lines during an approach is being improved.

5/ During the approach to land in a paddock, the balloon struck a power line. The pilot reported that the balloon's basket was approximately one meter above the ground and some arcing was observed around the base. Once the basket reached the ground, the arcing ceased. After ensuring that the power was switched off, the passengers and the pilot evacuated the balloon. There were no reported injuries.

6/ During the final approach, the balloon struck a power line. The balloon landed safely with no injuries or significant damage.

7/ During the approach, the balloon was severely forced downward and was pushed directly onto the top of three phase power lines. The pilot reported seeing an electrical arc flash on the left side before the balloon became airborne again. After several minutes the balloon was landed safely with no reported injuries to passengers or crew.

8/ As the balloon was landing, it travelled several meters horizontally before coming to rest with the envelope draped over a SWER power line. The occupants evacuated the balloon safely.

9/ During approach, the balloon encountered wind shear and descended prematurely. The balloon remained on the ground but forward momentum caused it to slide into low voltage power lines. Investigation by the pilot revealed evidence of scorched fabric and heat damage to the control lines around the mouth area of the envelope.”

All these incidents have the common thread that the powerlines were not seen until the last minute. In a balloon with its slow response time it is generally always too late to avoid contact. Whether by good luck or good management, none of these events resulted in injury, all had the potential to be fatal.

Every situation is different and to make a common rule of how to manage an incident is impossible to predict other than to stress that the pilot in command must be in command of the situation and manage it to the best of their ability.

Some may say, don't get into the situation, that is the best advice out, but these events continue to happen.

Pilots and ground crew must remain ever vigilant looking for the powerlines. Well-trained crew can advise a pilot in advance of risky situations ahead.

Remember, houses, sheds, pumps etc always need power, try to identify their power sources as you fly, in most cases the big lines will be obvious, it is the little ones you wont see.

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## **Pilots and Currency**

Already the Operations Manager's report in Aeronotes discusses the topic of currency.

Key points are:

- Students: must be financial members and exams need to be resat if PPC not obtained in the two year period following the exam pass.
- Pilots: must be financial and have flown a minimum of three hours and completed three inflations and deflations in the previous 12 months. Or, if not current as a result of annual hours, completed a check flight with an ABF instructor.
- Instructors and examiners: as above for pilots and have demonstrated competency to an ABF examiner in the previous 24 months.

Note: All check flights must be recorded on the forms provided on the ABF website and completed forms passed to ABF administrator for recording and audit purposes.

Refer to ABF operations Manual Section 3 for full details.

## Balloons and Quarantine Areas

We must continue to be ever mindful of the implications of transporting unwanted materials from property to property. These materials can be of various natures. Last issue of Pilot circular we discussed the Broomrape weed areas in South Australia. This time we look at Phylloxera. There are numerous references on the web and some useful ones will be quoted later.

Phylloxera, *Daktulosphaira vitifolia*, is a small sap sucking insect related to aphids that infests grapevines. It is a significant issue for grape growers due to production losses and death of vines associated with its presence, as well as the quarantine restrictions imposed on grapevine material movement from infested areas. Its seriousness can be demonstrated by the fact that it almost wiped out the French wine industry in the late 1800's through the destruction of millions of hectares of vines. The original grape industry at Geelong was decimated by phylloxera and has only recently been re-established after several decades of no grape production.

Phylloxera can be transported in soil from infected areas, which means that balloon baskets, retrieve vehicles all have the potential to transport the bug. Any equipment or vehicles operating in a suspected risk area should be thoroughly cleansed of all soil residues before leaving that area.

There are several areas in NSW and Vic that are infected and under strict management, two significant newer Victorian areas are in the Yarra Valley and Macedon areas.

Maps of infected areas are available from various websites and balloonists are advised strongly to review and add to flying maps if in their flying area.

Comprehensive details of areas are available on:

<http://www.phylloxera.com.au/regulation/zones.asp>

Good general reading also available on:

<http://www.gwrdc.com.au/nvhscphylloxera.htm>

Please remember, not only is there a potential of transporting Phylloxera and Broomrape, there are numerous other nasties such as common weeds and also potential livestock disease.

Many Australian agricultural areas are disease free and we need to do our best not to transport unwanted materials into these areas.